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JOHN DORRIEN

VOL. III

Julia Kavanagh



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VOL. III.

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JOHN DORRIEN.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

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"NATHALIE," "ADELE," "BESSIE,"
&c. &c.



IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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JOHN DORRIEN.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was this much good in Oliver Black, that he liked Antoinette none the less for deceiving her. The simplicity and inexperience which made her so easy a prey, the childish trust which never suggested a doubt of truth, were sweet to him. He was also young enough to feel fond of a girl who liked him so frankly, and whatever was amiable in his nature went forth towards Antoinette, and endeared him to her with every passing hour. And amiable Oliver was after a fashion. He had grown up so in manner and bearing quite naturally. It was pleasant to him to be liked. Principle he had not, and did not care to have; he sincerely thought it superfluous. Yet he was not incapable of a certain honesty of judgment. The one really good trait in him had appeared at Mr. Blackmore's death. On learning how he

legally stood, the unacknowledged child of a gentleman, the penniless son of a man of fortune, Oliver had accepted his hard fate with philosophic composure, and not uttered one word to reproach the man who, after rearing him in habits of luxury, left him shame and poverty by way of inheritance. He was man enough not to rail at fortune, and candid enough to confess to himself that he might have behaved no better than Mr. Blackmore—"perhaps not half so well," said Oliver to his own thoughts; "besides, the old boy liked me, and he would have done something for me if he had had time, I know."

But with this temperate view of his wrongs ended Mr. Oliver Black's impartiality. Set him face to face with life and other men, and he was resolved to get the best to be had out of both. He must have comfort, he must have ease, he must have money, and smoke the best cigars, and drink choice wines, and wear broadcloth, and have the love of some pretty woman or other; and he must stand well in life, and gild that fatal bar in his scutcheon, and float smoothly down the tide of fortune. That he, Oliver Black, should sink, and not swim, was as much out of the question as that he should not make a stepping-stone of John Dorrien, when his old friend so kindly gave him the opportunity of

doing so. It is hard to fight one's way up, to make a fortune out of nothing by way of beginning—some men have done it, nay, do it daily; but Oliver Black was too indolent to attempt anything of the kind—to step in another man's shoes was far more easy. John Dorrien had been slaving seven years to raise a falling house, but Oliver Black felt no scruple in supplanting him, and reaping the fruit of his labour. To save himself from so grievous a fate as that of poverty was merely self-preservation, and self-preservation is a law of nature, and Oliver Black was the man to obey it without a particle of remorse. It was awkward, it was unpleasant even, but it must be done—to throw away such a chance would be to deserve never to have another.

The thought, indeed, of taking the place of his friend did not come at once. There was not much hypocrisy or self-deceit about Oliver's inner man, but there was enough to make him comfortable within as he was pleasant without. He laid down to himself no deliberate plan of treachery. Why should he? When a man is always ready to pluck the fruit at hand, must he be for ever scheming about robbing orchards? When it suited him to do wrong, he did it, but he took no pleasure in it. He was not cruel, he was not unkind, but he had a ter-

rible attribute, which many men whose actions were worse than his never had. He was remorseless—he knew little pity, and no regret.

Thus, when it occurred to him that Mr. Dorrien's grand-daughter might be worth having, he at once made up his mind to see her; and when, having seen her, he found that she was quite pleasant enough in his eyes to make marriage endurable with her, no foolish scruples held him back. He had studied this life, and always seen that in the world's eyes success justifies most things. With regard to the life to come, he quietly ignored it. He had early reduced his decalogue to one simple command: "Make Oliver Black comfortable in this world, and as to the next, why, my dear boy, will it not be time to see about that when Oliver Black gets there?"

One of the pleasant necessities of this world now lay upon him in the duty of making love to Antoinette, and his love-making was all the more fervent that he had little time to spare. He had ingeniously telegraphed himself very unwell with influenza to Mr. Dorrien; but even influenza is limited, and he knew he could not prolong his absence beyond ten days, so he made the best of his time and of his opportunities. These were few; Mademoiselle Mélanie was too mistrustful to leave him alone with

Antoinette. She watched him closely and keenly; yet two or three times circumstances were too much for her, and the lovers had a view of their inner nature which her presence might have delayed.

The first time that this happened, the revelation she thus got made a deep impression on Antoinette. She had taken her lover to her favourite haunt, the deserted villa of the Clarkes. Mademoiselle Mélanie had said, "Go on first—I shall follow you directly," but something had no doubt occurred to delay her, for they went on alone, and looked for her in vain down the road when they stood by the iron gate.

"I told her we were coming here," said Antoinette, pushing the gate open: "She knows where to find us."

She walked on, with her light, dainty step and graceful carriage, looking, thought Oliver, a very charming young creature in that deserted avenue of cypress-trees. They were very old and solemn of aspect, and they rose in dark majesty, with here and there a flush of sunset touching a projecting bough, and the pale blue air of a southern sky for a background to their sombre masses. Oliver's sensuous nature was not without poetry. Those heathen emperors who sent Christians to the lions, who poisoned or murdered their best friends, who stopped at

nothing, had a keen sense of the beautiful for all that. They liked the finest statues and the fairest gardens, and they made themselves homes of which the loveliness has remained as a byword. Oliver's moral unscrupulousness by no means interfered with his appreciation of scenery. It was delicate and refined, and he now found a tender charm in the aspect of this deserted garden.

"We can wait for aunt here," said Antoinette, sitting down on the upper step of the *perron* leading to the forsaken house.

She, too, felt the sweetness of that fair evening hour. She clasped her hands around her knees, she looked at the faint blue promontory stretching on the pale sea, at the rich mountains stooping down with their forest crown to the rocky shore, and she felt blest in her very heart. A large, beautiful star was rising slowly above the horizon, and, as it rose, Antoinette's eyes followed it, and her spirit seemed to rise with it higher and higher to new regions of happiness and beauty.

Oliver, too, felt happy. He had half stretched himself at her feet, and his hand had sought and was clasping one of hers, so little, so soft and warm. His look rested on her rosy young face with tender pleasure. What a dear little thing she was!—how sweet, how graceful!

How pleasant it would be to have her in his house, not clothed in such shabby garments as those she wore—Oliver had no weakness for beauty unadorned—but attired in shining silks, with glittering jewels and soft laces, and all that can give a more delicate grace to woman's loveliness,

"Darling," he suddenly said, "don't you hate being poor?"

Antoinette, who was far gone in Eden, felt somewhat startled at so terrestrial a question; but she replied, with a pleasant laugh:

"No; why should I? I have been used to it too long."

"Well, I have not, that is true," he said. "But yet don't you hate it?"

"No," she slowly answered, "I do not."

She would have added that poverty with him had something delightful in it, but maiden modesty held back the frank confession. Oliver looked at her with some wonder. Was she speaking her real sentiments, or was this one of those conversational untruths which people are apt to utter almost unmeaningly?

"Why should I hate being poor?" she resumed. "I am young, I have good health, I never feel dull, and—and——"

"And what?"

"And there is some one who says he is very fond of me," she said, in a low voice.

"You are a darling! But for all that, my dear girl, I hate being poor. The mere thought that my pocket might be empty some day sends a cold thrill through me. Moreover, and above all things, I hate seeing you poor, and poor you shall not be; no, as true as my name is Oliver Black, you shall be a rich girl yet."

"Thank you," she laughed. "I suppose you mean to make a fortune for me?"

"Of course I do, and to take you to my poor father's château; but, *en attendant*, you shall have your own, ay, that you shall. Nothing shall stand between me and that object."

"My own?" asked Antoinette, smiling. "And what is my own, Oliver?"

"Your grandfather's inheritance, to be sure. John Dorrien is the best fellow in the world, but it makes my blood boil to see how he has usurped your place. You must get it back, Antoinette. John must be content to be a clerk, as I am. What would have been your father's, if he had lived, must be yours. It is not fair that a third or fourth cousin should possess it."

"Well, I do not think it is," said Antoinette, naïvely. "Only, if my grandfather does not like me, what can be done?"

"But your grandfather shall like you, and

you shall not be defrauded, not whilst I have brains, and will, and energy to prevent it," rejoined Oliver, with much emphasis. "Let John Dorrien take his proper place in the firm, the first, if you like, but let him do no more. It is too bad that he should be lord and master in Mr. Dorrien's house."

"It is hard," said Antoinette, reflectively. "Oh! Oliver, do look at that star, how clear, how glorious it is!"

Oliver did not look at that star, but at Antoinette's face, raised in tender admiration. His own darkened a little. How slight an impression he had produced, and yet this was not the first time that he had placed John Dorrien before her as the usurper of her rights. How was this? Was there some fatal flaw in this girl's nature, some feminine weakness, that rendered her incapable of resentment and ambition, some imperfection, that denied her that active love of money which leads the many so far?

Antoinette's next remark turned that uneasy doubt into unpleasant certainty. His question had awakened a train of thought of which he was unconscious. The allusion to her unknown father had recalled her little childish mother, and with the memory came a question, startling and awkward to a man of Mr. Black's turn of mind.

"Oliver, do you think it is any use praying for the dead?"

Oliver's arched eyebrows nearly met, though he looked smilingly up into the face of his young mistress, but he was too self-possessed to answer her with a sneer, so he said, gently,

"Well, it can do them no harm. But why do you put the question, darling?"

"Because," sadly said Antoinette, "Aunt Mélanie says it is no use, that all is over when life is ended, and that the dead have no souls to pray for. What do you think, Oliver?"

She looked at him with anxious, pleading eyes. Woman-like, she came to her lover as to a teacher, and, woman-like, too, she had felt with this first love the wakening of spiritual longings for soul and immortality. Antoinette had been reared in simple, practical irreligion. Mademoiselle Mélanie was an open infidel, and Antoinette's mother stood too much in awe of her sister-in-law to go against her teaching, if teaching it could be called. Mademoiselle Mélanie's atheism was simple negation. She never worried herself about the truth or error of religion. She had other thoughts, other cares, other sources of bitterness. To all that Antoinette could ask or say she returned a scornful "No," or, "Don't be a fool," by way of answer, until the child ceased to question, and Mrs.

George Dorrien weepingly requested her never to talk to her aunt on those subjects. It was too dreadful, she said. Indeed, she considered the theme so trying that she eluded it entirely, and, being too indolent and too languid to give her child any teaching of her own, she allowed her to grow up as she pleased, untaught to adore or to pray, simply conscious that men and women used certain forms of worship, but that one could live very easily without them.

Books had done little to supply the deficiency. Antoinette had read general literature, and this, as a rule, does not say much of the spiritual world. It often misinterprets it, and oftenest of all it ignores it. "Let us not talk of these things," it seems to say to the reader in Virgil's memorable words to Dante: "but look and pass on." *Guarda e passa*—sad words to deal with man's greatest hope and noblest aspiration—thought! But so it is. Christianity, by having passed into the hearts of all, has lost the place which ancient wisdom gave to its philosophic speculations. The catechism has taught us more than Plato ever knew, and divine truths have become common good. But perhaps the great number who possess such knowledge do not realise the utter ignorance of those to whom it has not been granted; and Antoinette was sadly, strangely

ignorant. Even her brief intercourse with the Clarkes had done nothing to enlighten her. They held erratic views on most subjects, and as every member of the family seemed inclined to travel on a separate spiritual path, Antoinette had found it more pleasant and more convenient not to attempt following any of them. That too was easy, for they were not zealous, and cared chiefly for the society of the Countess of Armaillé's daughter. Thus, when she now turned to Oliver for knowledge, Antoinette had a good fund of ignorance for him to work upon ; but she had also a wakening, questioning spirit, and this made the task rather trying and awkward.

Oliver was not ignorant by any means. He had been taught religion by Abbé Vêran, and irreligion by Mr. Granby. He had also flirted with every philosophic system of the day, and made himself a little creed of his own—pleasant, comfortable, easy, and convenient. Mr. Granby gave him a tincture of Hegel to begin with, but Oliver was too matter of fact to believe that all he felt within, and saw without himself, was as Mr. Granby expressed it, "a development of the idea." He might have been a Hegelian so far as moral laws went, for he really considered them amiable illusions ; but he liked his sensations, and objected to calling them ideas.

"Nonsense, Mr. Granby," he said, coolly, "the flavour I find on this cognac is something more than the development of an idea. I have a fancy I should like Comte—let us try him."

Mr. Granby did not like Comte, but he wanted to please his pupil, so they went into Comte for a time. Positivism was rather congenial to Oliver's turn of mind, but Comte himself amused him exceedingly. Foolish man, who had no faith in penance, and who ate dry bread for his dessert, who denied the divine origin of man, and who invented the religion of humanity, who prayed for hours daily, and had no god.

"Don't you think, Mr. Granby, that Comte was rather cracked?" asked Oliver, who, if he was willing to worship humanity, was like many another disciple of Comte, only willing to do so provided humanity meant himself.

"Most of these clever fellows are cracked," composedly answered Mr. Granby; "but these vagaries have nothing to do with Comte's method, you know."

"Of course not. I wonder if that Clotilde de Vaux, whom Comte adored in life, and worshipped in death—did he not pray to her, Mr. Granby? I wonder if she was handsome, or whether her beauty was a product of the idea."

Mr. Granby thought the lady was plain. Women who exercised such extraordinary fasci-

nation were often plain—they left so much to the imagination.

Philosophy thus studied was pleasant enough, and so Oliver trifled with Hegel and Comte, and went through Pantheism, and Eclecticism, and every other “ism,” until, as we have said, he made himself a little creed of his own. He ignored the Almighty with Comte, and agreed with Pantheism that the universe, instead of being created, has simply developed itself. He did not, however, go far or deep into the question of his origin. *Cui bono*. What matter where we come from, or, as to that, where we go to, so long as the present time can be made pleasant. He was young, he was handsome, he was strong, or held himself so. The world was all before him, the world and its kingdoms. He too had heard the voice which tempted Eve, and through whose sorcery Adam fell—“Ye shall be gods.” It was pleasant to self-love, to pride, to bow to no Divine Master, to hold the old ideas of sin and virtue worn-out creeds, and to laugh softly at the weak herds who cling to them still. It was comfortable to believe, with one of his philosophers, that man “has a sovereign right to all he can do;” and that those laws which the decencies of civilization require, are the only restraint he need acknowledge. Oliver had neither the low instincts nor the

violent passions which make vulgar criminals. He could take the good out of life, out of men and women, and yet not steal nor kill. Even when from Oliver Blackmore he became Oliver Black, his philosophic speculations produced no apparent change in his manner or feelings. He was still the same pleasant, easy, good-humoured young man that he had been. The keen ambition which his downfall had awakened, the remorseless determination to still enjoy the good things of this world that had come with poverty, were not to be read in the soft and laughing dark eyes, or in the irresistible smile of the late Mr. Blackmore's unacknowledged son.

What the world did not know, Oliver did not see any necessity to tell it; and he would have found it more convenient not to touch on such vexed questions as these which Antoinette now raised with her searching eyes fastened on his. So, though he answered her, he felt his ground first.

"Dearest," he said, with a half sigh, "why talk of such things? Men and women are fated to disagree on some topics, and this, I fear, is one. They are trained differently, and, sad to say, grow far—too far apart."

Antoinette fired up at once.

"Why should that be?" she asked.

"Oh! why indeed?" he sighed. "Well, I do think that star wonderfully beautiful."

"You will not answer me," said Antoinette, mortified. "You think I could not understand these matters. I am not so ignorant as you think."

Oliver protested he did not think her ignorant—"only of course her opportunities in La Ruya——"

"As if I had always lived in La Ruya," interrupted Antoinette. "Why, we only came here two years ago, when aunt was so unlucky at Monaco."

"Poor Mademoiselle Mélanie," feelingly said Oliver, taking care not to look surprised—"was she so very unlucky?"

"Oh! very. She gambled all we had, and we have been dreadfully pinched ever since. But I had masters before then, and I have learned plenty of things."

"Where?" asked Oliver.

"In London, in Brussels, in Rome," was the triumphant answer. "We did not stay long anywhere, however; and aunt never would let me learn music. Of course once she had taken to Monaco, it was out of the question. But when the Clarks were here," added Antoinette, looking wistfully at the closed windows of the villa, "I studied with them."

"Crochet?" suggested Oliver.

"All sorts of things," answered Antoinette, with much dignity. "Latin with Tom."

"How old was Tom?"

"Thirteen. I got on better with Latin than he did; but then poor Tom was stupid. And I am sure I could understand all about those things which you think so much beyond me."

"I only thought you might not be accustomed to philosophic speculations," said Oliver.

"What matter? I am sure I could understand them all the same," answered Antoinette, with the calm audacity of young people.

Oliver smiled, and ventured on gratifying her. Cautiously and skilfully he played with some of the vexed questions which lie at the root of Belief and Unbelief. Antoinette was profoundly ignorant of these matters, but she was quick, and she listened with rapt attention. Oliver could be fluent when he pleased, and her intent face both pleased and flattered him. Not for anything would Antoinette have lost a word which he uttered. It seemed so fine, so grand, that wonderful vision of an uncreated world ever developing itself in vast unbroken progress—man the Lord and God of it all."

"How splendid!" cried Antoinette, looking around her, as if this beautiful universe suddenly bore another meaning.

Oliver smiled good-naturedly at her enthusiasm.

"Yes, darling," he softly said, "it is splendid, as you say; but you are large-minded, and can understand. Women, as a rule, do not take to Pantheism; they are rather narrow, and prefer Monotheism."

"And yet it is so fine, so very fine, that hidden power pervading all we see," said Antoinette, still ardent. "And, Oliver, what do you think about praying for the dead?"

If Oliver had been a zealot, he could scarcely have helped being gently exasperated at so outrageous a question. Here was a would-be Pantheist talking with Monotheist ideas of the dead! As if the dead were more than a memory or a name! But, being no zealot, and being willing to make allowances for the emotional nature of woman, he checked a strong temptation to laugh, and, struck with a brilliant idea, plunged into that portion of Positivism which the disciples of Comte have so prudently discarded.

"Dearest," he said, tenderly, "why not pray to the dead, instead of praying for them? Their immortality is in our hearts. A man must worship his mother, wife, and daughter. They are his guardian angels in life, and to them, should they die first, he prays. A father, husband, and

son are the same objects of tender worship to woman. Let there be no sad visions of future woe, for if there are rewards there must be punishments. Let it all be the tenderness and devotion of loving hearts, of the feeling that binds *us*, dearest."

Here Mademoiselle Mélanie opportunely came up, and Pantheism and Positivism, to Oliver's great relief, were dropped for the while, but for the while only. Antoinette Dorrien was at the time of life when the mind is most eager to solve the great problem which lies in wait for us all, as the Sphinx of old lay in wait for her victims. Life and death are involved in the momentous riddles she utters. But is not every one of us an *Œdipus*? Do we ever doubt our wisdom when we rush on fate? Do we care for the bones of the victims which lie scattered on the cavern where broods that great iniquity, with the lovely face of woman to seduce, and the loathsome body of the serpent to crush those whom she ultimately devours.

Oliver, who was no fanatic of unbelief, would have been quite willing to let Antoinette's religion alone, so long as it did not interfere with her obedience to his wishes; but when she forced these questions upon him, he was subtle enough to see that it might be well if he had a double hold upon her. Thus it was that she became

his in soul as well as in heart. Twofold bondage, which implied much that Antoinette had never foreseen, and which made her weak and helpless in her lover's hands, as a tool is in the hands of a skilful master.

She did not feel or even suspect this till Oliver had long been gone. She had been out one morning sketching, for she drew well, and especially with much fancy and taste, and she came in warm, flushed, and tired, but charmed with her morning's work.

"Oh, aunt," she said, "it has been so delightful!"

"Have you finished the waterfall?" asked Mademoiselle Mélanie, sharply.

Antoinette blushed a little and hung her head. She had begun to draw a waterfall some time back, but had made no progress with her task. Once a goat perched on a rock had tempted her irresistibly. The waterfall could wait, but the goat certainly could not. Another time there was an effect of sunlight so beautiful but so fleeting that it would have been a mortal pity not to catch it ere it faded away; and so she had been lured by one thing and by another, and the waterfall remained unfinished, with the outline of its trees and rocks on the sky, and a blank where the foam of its waters should have been.

"No, I did not finish the waterfall," hesitatingly answered Antoinette. "The fact is, aunt, I found a group of ferns so lovely that it would have been a shame not to do them at once; and really, aunt, I think they are not amiss; and then there is plenty of time for the waterfall, you know."

"Is there? We are going to Paris after tomorrow—to Mr. Dorrien's house. At least, *you* are," bitterly added Mademoiselle Mélanie. "He has written—here is his letter."

The sketch-book nearly fell from Antoinette's hands, her surprise was so great, but on surprise joy quickly followed.

"Oh! aunt," she cried, "is it possible? Has Oliver already spoken to Mr. Dorrien?"

"There never was such a simpleton as that girl!" contemptuously exclaimed Mademoiselle Mélanie, and she curtly reminded her niece that Oliver not having yet returned to Paris, nothing was less likely than that he should have spoken to Mr. Dorrien.

"But then he will come back, aunt," said Antoinette, with gladness still in her eyes; "and, as he is one of the firm, why, I shall see him often, very often, and he will speak to Mr. Dorrien in time, and Mr. Dorrien will give him a good position, and he will be all right again. Poor Oliver! You know, aunt, how badly his

relations have used him. It seems there was a flaw in his father's marriage to his mother," continued Antoinette, looking at her aunt with great innocence, "and his cousin took advantage of it to rob him of his property. And he is so fond of the old house he was born in. He hopes to buy it back some day. To buy back one's own house—that is hard. I wish Mr. Dorrien would lend or give him the money."

Mademoiselle Mélanie laid her hand on the young girl's shoulder, and looking in her face with a cold, hard look, she said,

"Remember that Mr. Dorrien is to know nothing of your engagement to Oliver."

"I know you made me promise that," answered Antoinette, with a blank face; "but now, aunt, how can it be? Why, I may see Oliver every day."

"What about it?"

"Oh! aunt," exclaimed the young girl, with a frightened, deprecating look, "you know I am so stupid—I am, I really am," she said, almost, humbly. "I do not know how to tell a lie."

"You will learn!" laughed Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"No, no," cried Antoinette, alarmed, "I cannot; I can never learn that—I am too stupid."

"Rubbish!"

But Antoinette persisted that she was stupid, and could not do it.

"Well, then, do not," said her aunt, changing her tactics, for she knew of old that Antoinette could be obstinate, "do not tell a lie. Keep your counsel. Mr. Dorrien will never ask you if you are engaged to Oliver Black, and all you have to do is not to tell him."

"Oh! of course," cried Antoinette, brightening, "I can do that; besides," she added, with a happy smile, "Oliver will soon tell him all about it himself."

This difference was easily settled, but Joli proved the cause of one far more serious.

"You are not going to take that sparrow," authoritatively said Mademoiselle Mélanie, when they were packing, and she saw Antoinette settling the cage.

"Not take my little Joli?" cried Antoinette, indignantly. "Leave Joli behind—never!"

"I say you shall not take him."

"Aunt, I will. Nothing will make me forsake Joli."

"Say another word, and I will wring the little wretch's neck," cried Mademoiselle Mélanie, getting in one of her blind rages.

"And if you do, aunt," answered Antoinette, who was very white, "I will never see you again."

Mademoiselle Mélanie burst out laughing, and Joli, who was hopping about in his cage, chirruped at his little mistress.

Antoinette felt quite triumphant at her victory, and, in her good humour, made no difficulty in acceding to various hints which her aunt gave concerning her guidance in Mr. Dorrien's house, until Oliver should have spoken to that gentleman. From a distance it all seemed very easy, and then Antoinette felt so sure that her lover would lose no time in making all right.

But the all right of youthful hope is very apt to turn into the all wrong of experience. Difficulties which she had not anticipated hemmed in Antoinette on every side. She very soon saw that discovery would ruin both Oliver and herself, and she kept their joint secret, not merely because she had promised to do so to her aunt, but because she could not help herself. She still hoped that her lover's return to Paris would be the end of her probation, but she soon lost that illusion. Only one thing was certain: however she might rebel, Oliver Black was her master. She felt it when they met again. She felt it when she was alone in her room on the evening of the day when she had gone to Versailles. Mrs. Reginald half suspected her; John had uttered a warning which had filled her with shame and

fear. To pay Mademoiselle Mélanie a stolen, surreptitious visit, was to rush upon discovery and what to a girl unused to deceit seemed perdition; but for all that Antoinette did not dare to disobey her lover. "If I do not do it," she thought, "he will do something dreadful, like the slipping of the note in my hand this evening, and he will be ruined, and all will be lost."

CHAPTER II.

MADemoiselle MÉLANIE was making coffee with a little machine ingeniously constructed so as to tumble every five seconds, and thus either spill the water within, or extinguish the blue flame of the spirit without. The contrivance was one which would have tried anyone's temper, and it drove Mademoiselle Mélanie half wild. Even when she had compelled this erratic machine into a sort of steadiness, she stood over it, giving the flickering blue flame a moody look, which became thoroughly scornful as it wandered to the poor furniture, faded paper hangings, and low ceiling of the room in which she was preparing her morning meal.

Mademoiselle Mélanie was a rebel at heart, and she carried on a perpetual and useless quarrel against Fate. Just now her lot was not a pleasant one, and retrospect seemed exceedingly bitter. How steady and sure had

been the downward course of her life! A luxurious home in the tropics with her brother and her sister-in-law, a still comfortable home, though no longer luxurious, with her sister-in-law and her second husband, then Mr. Dorrien's house, not a home, but a very fair place to visit in, then the south of France and the ease of southern life, till that fatal Monaco brought restricted means and their bitterness, and now these dingy rooms on the third-floor of an old house in the Marais!

Our heart makes our home. Many a brave spirit, trusting and hopeful, has been glad of the shelter of rooms as poor as these which Mademoiselle Mélanie now scorned; but where is the use of arguing against discontent? This woman would have found some fault with her lot if it had been cast in a palace, and her present position was certainly neither pleasant nor exhilarating.

"Why does she not come or write?" thought Mademoiselle Mélanie; "the little ungrateful viper, she leaves me by as soon as she can."

The thought was still passing through her mind, when a smart ring at the door seemed to answer it. Mademoiselle Mélanie went and opened it, and there, on the dark landing, stood Antoinette, fresh as a rose, and smiling as the morning.

"Oh! aunt, how are you?" she said, throwing her arms around Mademoiselle Mélanie's neck and kissing her. "Now please do not scold," she added, deprecatingly, "for I am so hungry, and I came out without waiting for breakfast."

This was touching the right chord. Mademoiselle Mélanie was too much of a woman not to like to feed the creature she loved after her own hard fashion; so she now allowed herself to be kissed, and she showed her niece in, and looked at her kindly enough.

"Why, I declare you are making coffee," cried Antoinette, in great glee. "Oh! the little darling machine! And see, aunt, I passed by a baker's, and bought the prettiest, and, I am sure, the most delicious little rolls you ever saw. If we only had a little fresh butter," she added, with a sigh of regret.

Mademoiselle Mélanie tried to remain grim and forbidding, but she could not. This girl, to whom she was almost always harsh, was her soft spot, after all, and then it was pretty, even in her severe eyes, to see Antoinette taking off her hat and gloves, and flitting about in her becoming attire, and with her graceful motions. It was pleasant to see how softly and neatly she brought forth all that was needful for the morning meal; how she seemed to know without

being told where she was to find everything she wanted.

"A clever little monkey!" thought Mademoiselle Mélanie. "Yes, a clever one indeed."

"And now it is all ready, aunt," said Antoinette, looking at the table with a critical, yet satisfied air. "Shall we begin?"

They sat down, and, as she poured out the coffee, Antoinette, heaving a little sigh, said, in a depressed tone,

"When did you see Oliver, aunt?"

"In La Ruya," drily replied Mademoiselle Mélanie. "Why should I see him now? He does not want me any longer, does he?"

"Oh! pray do not be sarcastic, aunt," implored Antoinette. "Poor Oliver! He has put himself into a nice mess with all this. He wants to talk to us, I suppose, for he slipped a note into my hand last night bidding me tell you to take me to the Parc Monceaux this morning. I know the place, it is one of the prettiest I ever saw, but so very, very far away, and we are to be there by ten o'clock, says Oliver."

"Then you would not have come but for that?" said Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"How could I?" answered Antoinette. "I did not dare to ask leave to come, lest I should be forbidden to do so, and you do not know what it is to be in that large house, and to feel

like a poor little mouse, and everyone like a great, great big cat watching you, and ready to pounce upon you."

She looked very doleful. Mademoiselle Mélanie's eyes sparkled. What was it? What did they do to her? How did they use her? They were unkind, she knew they were! And so, whilst they took their breakfast, she listened, with a dark and eager look, to the tale of Antoinette's wrongs. The coffee-machine had put Mademoiselle Mélanie in a bad temper, which she wanted to vent upon some one. Antoinette's blooming face had conjured the storm from herself, but it should light on some devoted head, and Mr. Dorrien and his whole household now came in for the benefit of the lady's displeasure. Antoinette heard her out, and took no exception to all her bitter comments, until John got his share, when she uttered a decisive protest.

"No, aunt, you are all wrong," said she. "John is very good and very kind to me, and I am also sure that he is true."

"Then you had better marry him," disdainfully retorted Mademoiselle Mélanie, as she pushed away her empty cup, and stood up to change her dress previous to going out.

"I have no doubt it would be a very good thing for me, in every sense of the word, to

marry John Dorrien," composedly replied Antoinette; "but I have a strong fancy that, even if I wished for such a thing, it would be of no use, and that John is much too good and too wise to have anything to do with me."

Mademoiselle Mélanie stared in blank surprise, but Antoinette did not seem to think she had said anything unusual, and drew on her gloves with perfect tranquillity.

"In what part of the garden is he to meet us?" asked Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"He did not say, aunt."

"Convenient!" was the dry answer. "I shall go to the Colonnade."

It is a long drive from the Marais to Monceaux, and it was long past ten when the two ladies alighted at the tall gilt gates which open into the beautiful green gardens. Mademoiselle Mélanie went at once to the Colonnade, and sat on a bench near it, but Antoinette felt restless, and said she must walk about awhile. She did not go far, but kept within the shadow of the grey columns which encircle the dark and still waters. Streaks of golden sunshine tipped the rich ivy wreathed round every stone shaft, and played on the surface of the little lake below, but gloom, soft, green, and deep, enclosed the spot. The air was fresh, and children and nursemaids favoured the more open spaces. Antoi-

nette looked shyly round her, but there was no sign of Oliver. Perhaps he would not come, and that all her risk was vain. What would they think of her at La Maison Dorrien? How would it all end? A swan was sailing towards his home in a little islet on the lake. Antoinette paused to look at him, and internally addressing him, she said,

"No one will ask you where you have been. Your house is your own, and——"

Here an arm was slipped within hers, and looking round with a start, she saw the laughing face of Oliver Black bending towards her.

"I am late," he said—"so sorry, darling. But John Dorrien seemed to guess I was coming to you—he would not let me go."

"Oh! Oliver," said Antoinette, with a frightened face, "I am afraid, I am, that he does guess!"

"What makes you think so?" asked Oliver, almost sharply.

"Anything and everything," she replied. "Oliver, must this last much longer?"

"If you mean our present position," he answered, coolly, "remember, dearest, that it has not lasted twenty-four hours yet."

"But I cannot bear it," she remonstrated—"I cannot indeed, Oliver. It makes me feel such a guilty thing!"

"My dear girl, you are not guilty—is not that enough?"

"But I do feel guilty," persisted Antoinette—"ever so guilty; and though you will not confess it, I am sure, Oliver, that so do you."

Oliver looked annoyed.

"My darling," he said, with just a touch of temper, "you ought to remember what I have already told you—there is no absolute right, no absolute wrong in anything. Of course our position is unpleasant and awkward. It would be more agreeable to meet and talk in the old garden of La Maison Dorrien than to do so here. If you dislike concealment, you may be sure that it has no attractions for me; but the fault is not ours. John Dorrien is the best fellow in the world, but he has done, and is doing, all the mischief. He has accepted your inheritance, and he means to keep it. Of course he is willing to share it with you, but unluckily there is no such willingness on your side—*ergo*, John Dorrien must give way. I see no help for it. For my part I regret it—I always liked him since I saw him on board the steamer, the queerest little fellow. So far as I am concerned, I could get on elsewhere as well as at Mr. Dorrien's—better perhaps. I must be fond of you, Antoinette, to tolerate this position."

She had heard him with downcast eyes; she now looked up again.

"Is it right?" she asked once more.

Oliver laughed at her persistency.

"But since there is no absolute right, no absolute wrong in anything," he argued, "every man with an atom of sense knows that right and wrong are as inextricably mingled in human affairs as they are in human beings. Now look at John Dorrien, a good fellow, a sincere Christian, but one who clings to the goods of this world as much as you and I do, Antoinette. I do not blame him, I only state the fact. He will fight hard to keep his position, and we must fight hard to keep him out of it. He finds plenty of arguments on his side of the case, so do we on ours. The only question at stake is who shall win? That is the real right and wrong. Of course if he prevails he will give Providence the praise; and if he fails he will submit to its decrees; whereas, if I fail, I shall simply think that I committed some blunder; and, if I succeed, I shall call myself a clever fellow."

Antoinette gave him a wistful, perplexed look.

"John Dorrien is very religious, is he not?" she said slowly.

"Yes, and Providence is one of his hobbies,

poor dear John Dorrien! For my part I contend that a wise man's Providence is of his own fashioning. Let us take ourselves. We have been reared in comfort and ease. It is absurd to suppose that we should not suffer cruelly if we fell into real hard poverty. We owe it to ourselves not to allow such a catastrophe. Mind, I do not say that Providence owes it to us. I say we owe it to ourselves, and I for one am resolved to fight my way back to what I have lost. Look at yourself, my darling, look at your little soft hands,"—he took up one as he spoke—"and tell me if they were made for the same work as Jeannette's poor red paws. It is monstrous to suppose that you should ever exchange places with that creature.

Antoinette laughed.

"Jeannette would not mind taking my place," said she.

"Well," coolly replied Oliver, "let her—if she can. But you see she cannot—she cannot become the well-born, pretty, refined girl you are. Can she now?"

Antoinette smiled, for the voice of flattery is sweet to a girl's ear when it is that of the man she loves.

"Poor Jeannette," she said, "must she keep her red hands and be a drudge to the end?" Then suddenly, and with her eyes fixed on his

face, "Oliver, what do you think John Dorrien would say on all this? I mean what would his opinions be?"

"My dearest, did we meet to discuss John Dorrien and his opinions? Now just sit down here, and let us talk of something else. Mr. Dorrien is very fond of you, of course; well—"

"Oh, no, Mr. Dorrien does not like me at all," interrupted Antoinette.

"Not like you?—impossible!"

"Indeed he does not. I really think he dislikes me."

Oliver looked incredulous and perplexed, but Antoinette, when he questioned her, which he did very closely, brought forward so many little proofs to strengthen her assertion, that he reluctantly admitted Mr. Dorrien was not a model grandpapa.

"You must improve him, darling," he said gaily; "be, as you can if you only choose, winning and pretty. Surely," he added, glancing at her in pleased admiration—"surely you can coax a grandfather's heart."

"No," very decisively answered Antoinette. "There is something about Mr. Dorrien that keeps me at arm's length. You will understand when you see us together. John has seen it, and he has told me that he will be my friend; for John is very kind, though I betray him."

"My dear child, there can be no betrayal where there is no trust; but, by-the-by, what did you mean when you said that you feared John guessed something?"

He bent his eyes searchingly on her face. Antoinette looked ready to cry.

"I am very miserable," she said. "I do not remember John's exact words. Let me see—yes, he said yesterday, when we were at Versailles, that I had chosen an unsafe path, and I am afraid he must guess all about us."

Oliver smiled derisively.

"Impossible, my dear child!" he remarked, with gentle pity for her fears. "Why, John had not seen us together when he said that. No, no, depend upon it he meant something else; he always was fond of preaching, was John Dorrien; only we may just as well be on our guard, and not betray what he must not know—you understand, dearest?"

"Yes," despondently answered Antoinette, "I do understand. I am sure it is all wrong, and I am very, very miserable, for every word I hear about lies and treachery seems meant for me."

Oliver bit his lip, and looked both grave and perplexed. He was not troubled with conscientious scruples himself, and he was not prepared to find them in others; yet here were

these weeds, for so he held them, springing up in most unwelcome soil, and how to uproot them he knew not. Argument seemed thrown away upon this girl, in whose power he had placed himself. His philosophy had evidently taken no deep root in her mind, and he sincerely regretted having tried its power upon her. He had opened the floodgate of a passionate young soul, that would know, that would question, that would seek the truth, and he found it troublesome. Every human soul holds within itself the faculties of doubt and belief. Oliver had given the preponderance to doubt; he really liked no law, human or divine, but human law he was too sensible to violate. He had keen passions; he was fond of money, of pleasure, of ease, but he would never have placed himself within the reach of Judge or Jury to gratify these tastes. If he had been a Christian, he would have had the same wholesome dread of Divine judgment, and never put it in the power of heaven to find him out; but greatness and generosity were not in him, and he would have been careful not to do too much for the Almighty. The formula which he had chosen, that he would admit nothing which his reason did not sanction, was acceptable to his tastes and inclinations. It pledged him to nothing; his moral world remained free.

Reason, which burns with so pure a flame in fine minds, is a very dim sort of candle indeed in low ones. It never told this young man, that he was to lay any restraint on his passions, save so far as his safety was concerned; then, indeed, it became clear, firm, and inexorable. Oliver had the greatest contempt for common rogues and vulgar villains: they were fools.

A man of this temperament could not be a zealot. He had no strong faith in his own opinions, and, having in him a touch of that poetry which feels what is graceful and becoming, he rather liked religion of a certain kind for women. He had as a boy read the lives of the saints, and remembered some very pretty legends in those old Bollandists. If Antoinette had been a believer in those relics of a mediæval past, he would have been loth to disturb her simple faith. It would have been so much easier to leave her to her gentle superstitions, as he condescendingly called those records of the great and the good. But this could not be. He found an inquiring soul and a blank page, or one on which very little had been written; that little he did his best to efface. He was no zealot, as we have already said, and if he had meddled with Antoinette's religion, such as it was, it was because he could not very well manage her without so doing. A

girl who thinks about her soul is less liable to be a docile instrument in a man's hands than the girl who is not sure that she has got one; but Antoinette's natural integrity now suddenly interfered with these calculations, and gave him difficulties upon which he had not reckoned.

"My dear creature," he remarked, with a sort of candour in his look and tone, "what am I to say that will set your mind at ease? As soon as I can see my way clear, I will claim you openly; in the meanwhile, we must stay as we are."

She looked at him, and he returned the look with a certain hardness in his gaze that quelled her. A kind of fear, not of her position merely, but of Oliver Black himself, now crept round her heart for the first time. She had given herself a master, and she felt it.

"My darling," he said, very tenderly, "why will you not trust in me? Up to the present I have got on admirably with Mr. Dorrien. He actually tells me things he hides from John—on my word he does; and, what is more, it is none of my seeking. It all comes from himself. I really believe—I do—that, of his own accord, he will give up that absurd plan of fastening John to you, and that, without being unjust to dear John, who is the best and worthiest fellow in the world, he will be just to you. John is

quite right in thinking that he deserves something handsome from La Maison Dorrien. He does. Let him have it; but let him not have you, my treasure. Be only patient a little while—a very little while—and I shall make all right, depend upon it.”

He smiled so kindly, he spoke so confidently, that fear left Antoinette, and trust came back, as if by magic.

“Oh! yes,” she warmly cried, “I know you will—I am sure of it.”

“Of course I will,” he returned, cheerfully, pleased, spite his cynicism, to meet the fond, confiding look of her soft dark eyes. “It will be all so easy, if you will only let me manage.”

To trust in the man she loves, to lean upon him, is a woman’s irresistible impulse. Most willingly did Antoinette now throw her burden upon Oliver. Of course he would manage it all. What ailed her that she had not seen that? And of course, too, he meant well and kindly to John. What ailed her that she had not seen that too? And so she listened to his plausible speech, and held it a very gospel; and all that had frightened her pride or alarmed her conscience seemed to vanish as baleful mists fade away in the morning sun.

“And now,” said Oliver, well pleased at the result of his eloquence—“now let us settle

about our little interviews and our letters. Your aunt will be invaluable in that respect."

"Will she?"

So spoke Mademoiselle Mélanie, who now stood before the pair, pale with anger at their long forgetfulness of her existence. Antoinette gave a guilty start, and blushed crimson; but Oliver only laughed gaily in the irate lady's face.

"Of course she will," he resumed, in a light tone. "What should we do—what should we ever have done," he pointedly added, "without that kind aunt?"

Antoinette gave him a frightened look; she thought his audacity so great in thus addressing Mademoiselle Mélanie. But the event justified his daring; the lady tightened her lips, and looked above the two heads of the lovers as they sat on the wooden bench, and, smiling after a lofty fashion of her own, said it was a fine day.

"Yes, but I must go," hesitatingly remarked Antoinette, looking at Oliver as if fearful lest he should detain her.

He had no such inclination. He did not mean to linger long over this affair; but he was not prepared for immediate detection, and he really thought that Antoinette had been out too long already.

"This is how you must account for your ab-

sence," he said, rising, and taking her arm—"you must say that you went to see your aunt, but of course you have already said that."

"No, I said nothing."

Oliver looked vexed.

"My dear creature, how could you be so imprudent? Why, you must have been missed, and——"

"Oh! I left word that I should not be in for breakfast."

"Very silly, very imprudent," remarked Oliver, looking more and more amazed. "There was no need for it, moreover. However, the mischief is done, and all you have to do now is to mend it as best you can. Say that you went to see your aunt, and have breakfast with her, and that she took you out driving, and brought you here. That will account for your long absence—besides, the nearer truth one keeps, the better it always is."

Antoinette heard him abashed, and answered not one word. She felt humbled and ashamed at the part she was acting; mortified, too, at having the very words she was to speak dictated to her; and yet she saw no help for it, and she was honest enough to confess to herself that, even if Oliver had not suggested this explanation of her absence, she could have given none other.

"Mademoiselle Mélanie and I," continued Oliver, "will settle all about our future meetings. I have no time to do so now with you—besides, it will require consideration."

The real truth was that Oliver had no plan at all, and did not care to have one. He was no subtle plotter, laying deep schemes, but a bold gambler, ready to seize on chances, and, if need were, to make them. Brief as had been this morning's interview with Antoinette, he felt that it had lasted long enough, and he shrewdly guessed that the less the young girl knew about his plans and views the better it would be for his cause. It is rare indeed when the serpent does not come between the Adams and Eves of this world, and sow discord where there should be love, and between these two he was coming early and fast.

"I dare not drive home with you," said Oliver, with a sigh, as he handed Antoinette and her aunt into a little open carriage which he hailed for them; "but I shall see you this evening, I hope. Good-bye, darling."

And thus they parted; and Antoinette looked wistfully after her lover, and wondered at this brief interview, which she had come so far to seek.

"Well," impatiently said Mademoiselle Mélanie, "what comes next? What have you

both decided upon? When is that John Dorrien to walk out?"

Her eyes sparkled at the thought. Antoinette was startled, and replied with a half-frightened air,

"We have decided upon nothing, aunt. Besides, I leave it all to Oliver."

"Then you are a simpleton," sharply answered her aunt, tightening her lips. "What is he?—nothing; and you are all, remember that."

"I am very little, aunt," replied Antoinette, somewhat sadly—"indeed, I think sometimes that I am nothing at all."

She never thought so more than when the carriage drove her to the door of the Hôtel Dorrien, and she found herself face to face with her grandfather on alighting at the old gates. He raised his hat with frigid courtesy to Mademoiselle Mélanie, who all but laughed with triumph in her face, and, taking his granddaughter's arm, he led her across the court to the house.

"You have been out with that lady, I presume?" he said, as they walked up the *perron*.

"Yes," answered Antoinette, trying to look unconcerned, "I have."

"Then I beg that you will do so no more. Indeed, I expect that you will hold no inter-

course with Mademoiselle—I forget her name. Brénu,” addressing a porter who was passing by, “is Monsieur John in the store-room. Yes. Well, then, tell him, please, that I beg he will let me see those papers. As I was saying, my dear,” resumed Mr. Dorrien, turning to Antoinette, “I expect you will hold no intercourse with that lady whilst you are under my roof. I should object to it.”

He spoke with no appearance of anger, but his careless coldness was all the more mortifying. Of this, too, he seemed unaware; and the “good morning, my dear,” with which he parted from Antoinette as they had ascended the *perron*, and he entered his own rooms and left her at the foot of the staircase, was essentially urbane and gentlemanlike in its coldness.

CHAPTER III.

SMALL slights sting the young very sharply. That armour which we all must don if we would pass scathless through life, and which grows so hard, and encases us so well that in the end only the keenest weapon can pierce it, and inflict a wound, is very weak and thin in our youth. Then blame is not to be endured, a word of reproof is an insult, indifference is unutterable mortification. Alas! of all things, that is the one we can least understand. We are so much to ourselves, and it seems so strange that we should be so little to others.

When the door of his room closed on Mr. Dorrien, Antoinette stood as he had left her, shame and mortification struggling in her heart, and in the meaning of her expressive face. She had not rallied from either feeling when she heard a light foot spring up the steps of the *perron* behind, and turning round hastily, she saw John Dorrien, with some papers in his hand. A flush of glad surprise passed across

his features as he saw Antoinette. The young girl's escapade had been the subject of Mrs. Reginald's comments, not loud, but deep, at the breakfast-table.

"That little thing will come to grief," had said Mrs. Reginald, shaking her head ominously; "and it is a pity, because she is a nice little thing, spite her nonsense."

"She must have been very badly reared," remarked Mrs. Dorrien, indignation proving stronger than her wish to make the best of Antoinette to her son. "I am sure," she feelingly added, "that Mademoiselle Basnage would not have behaved so."

John, though silent, had had his own thoughts. His prevailing fear had been lest Antoinette's ignorance of Paris and its ways should have led her into some danger. His first feeling on seeing her safe again was one of relief, but, quickly reading the meaning of her troubled countenance, he exclaimed,

"What ails you, Antoinette? Have you met with any unpleasantness?"

"Oh! no," answered Antoinette, turning her head away, that he might not see the tears in her eyes, "my unpleasantness is not out, but in. John, I wish I had never entered this house."

John Dorrien looked both sorry and perplex-

ed. He took her hand, and gently leading her through the glass door that opened on the garden, he said, kindly, as he walked by her side,

"Perhaps I can help, perhaps I can advise. Take a turn with me, and tell me all about it."

He spoke so kindly, he looked so concerned, that Antoinette's heart opened to him—so far, at least, as it could. So, letting him lead her to the stone bench by the river-god, she sat down there and told him her trouble. Why did Mr. Dorrien treat her so? Why was he so unkind, not to say despotic, as to forbid her holding any intercourse with her aunt?

"But she is not your aunt," objected John, gently.

"What matter? I have always called her aunt."

"Yes, it seems hard," he soothingly replied; "but remember that, whilst you are under Mr. Dorrien's care and guardianship, you must obey his wishes, even in this."

"Why so?" she asked, indignantly. "It is so unjust. If there be anything wrong about aunt, why did he leave me with her when my poor mother died?"

"Mr. Dorrien did not know of Mrs. George Dorrien's death till I told him of it," answered John, quickly.

Antoinette's look of surprise made him aware of his self-betrayal. He coloured deeply, then, laughing a little, to cover his embarrassment, said, "I was in the south this year, and thus learned the truth, which, for some purpose of her own, Mademoiselle Mélanie had concealed."

He tried to speak with seeming unconcern, but he was not successful. Antoinette darted a quick look at him, and read the story of the past in his face. In a moment she guessed it all. He was the stranger whose questions concerning herself and her mother, when repeated in part by Madame Brun, had long perplexed her, until her girlish fancy had identified him with Oliver Black. The young man's laughing denial had only confirmed her belief. "How could I be so foolish?" she now swiftly thought. "Did not Madame Brun say that young man had curly brown hair, and is not Oliver's hair dark and silky? Of course it was John!"

Yes, of course it was John, and so she had been brought to this house not because Mr. Dorrien's heart yearned towards his son's child, after his long forgetfulness, but because Mr. Dorrien's young cousin had willed it so. Her heart beat with involuntary emotion, her brow crimsoned with a sudden shame, as, for the first time, she guessed that, in some sort, John cared for her. She rose, he rose too, and so they

stood face to face, both silent, both embarrassed and troubled, till Mr. Dorrien suddenly came up to them, and, giving them anything but a pleased look, said, with marked emphasis,

"You seem to have forgotten, John, that I was waiting. I suppose those are the papers in your hand?"

"They are, sir, and I beg your pardon. I came out here with Miss Dorrien, and——"

"Yes, yes, so I see; but Miss Dorrien will have the goodness to wait awhile. I particularly want to go out early this morning—if one can call twelve o'clock early," added Mr. Dorrien, looking at his watch.

Antoinette, without saying a word, or giving either Mr. Dorrien or John a look, walked away towards the house.

She had scarcely reached her room when the luncheon bell rang. She would gladly have remained where she was, but did not dare to do so. Mrs. Dorrien and Mrs. Reginald only were present. Mr. Dorrien and John were engaged, said Mrs. Dorrien, with a look of mystery and consequence that implied—"I know something, and you do not."

"You made us very anxious this morning, my dear," said Mrs. Reginald to Antoinette; and with this brief remark she dismissed the matter of the young girl's delinquency.

Mrs. Dorrien was not so easily pacified. She was a mother, and touchy, as most mothers are. A mother's instinct also told her that her son had undergone some wrong at Antoinette's hands, and she felt affronted. That Antoinette should not appreciate John was simply monstrous! She lost no time in showing the young lady her mistake.

"I wish Monsieur Basnage would bring his daughter to town this Winter," she said, addressing Mrs. Reginald across the table, and ignoring Antoinette utterly.

"Do you?" replied Mrs. Reginald, opening her eyes wide. "Why so?"

"I want to see her again," said Mrs. Dorrien, with a nod and a smile; "I take a particular interest in that young lady."

"Well, I cannot say that I do," composedly remarked Mrs. Reginald. "Monsieur Basnage is no favourite of mine, and if his daughter is like him, she——"

"Oh! she is charming!" Mrs. Dorrien hastened to interrupt—"a charming girl; accomplished—reared in a convent——"

"A doll!" interrupted Mrs. Reginald, who was in one of her obstinate, fractious moods. "All girls reared after a pattern are dolls, as a matter of course; and French girls are the most dolly girls I ever saw," added Mrs. Reginald, fasten-

ing her obstinate brown eye on Mrs. Dorrien.

"Well, well," said the lady, giving up the argument in despair, but smiling good-humouredly as she did so, "I suspect, dear, that neither you nor I are fair judges of this matter. Now John's opinion of Mademoiselle Basnage would be worth something."

"And what do boys know about girls?" asked the indomitable Mrs. Reginald. "Nothing, or worse than nothing. Bless you, the more dolly they are, the better they like them," she added somewhat bitterly, as she remembered that it was for a doll of the worst kind that she had been betrayed and forsaken.

"Well, Mr. Dorrien is no boy," persisted Mrs. Dorrien, who was bent on impressing the silent and apparently indifferent Antoinette with a sense of the unknown Mademoiselle Basnage's merits, "and he says that Mademoiselle Basnage is charming."

John's entrance put an end to the argument. He hurried over his meal, scarcely spoke, never looked at Antoinette, and left, with an apology, before the repast was fairly ended.

"Poor John!" sighed Mrs. Dorrien; "he has a hard life of it."

"My dear, he likes it," said Mrs. Reginald, kindly; "depend upon it, too, that it has saved him from much mischief. Why, good for little

though his friend, Mr. Black, for instance, is, yet you may be sure that, if he had worked as hard as our John has, he would not be such a pitiful little fellow as he is."

It required all Antoinette's self-control not to break out on hearing this uncalled-for attack; but what right had she to speak, to take the part of Oliver, or utter even a protest in his behalf? Burning with silent and useless indignation, she rose from table as soon as she could decently do so, and retired to her own room.

Her thoughts there were not pleasant, and were as varied, though not as bright, as the colours of the rainbow. With a girl's rapid intuition, she guessed that she had been preferred to Mademoiselle Basnage, and she was touched and sorry that it was so; for, if John had only left her in her solitude, would not everything have gone on well between her and Oliver? Whereas now——

Her tears flowed at the thought of the perplexities which Mr. Dorrien's prohibition of intercourse with her aunt must produce.

"Oh, if I could only be free from all this concealment!" she thought, with some passion—"if I only could!"

Here the door of her room opening, and Mrs. Reginald walking in, scarcely gave her time to hide her tears.

"Yes, my dear," said the lady, sitting down, "you are in trouble, I know, and so I have come to comfort and to preach. Why, child," she added, with her brown eye full on Antoinette, "what possessed you to go out this morning, and make Mr. Dorrien look black as night?"

"I have been accustomed to go out alone," said Antoinette, gravely.

"In La Ruya, not in Paris, where you are Mr. Dorrien's grand-daughter, and your position——"

"Then I wish I had no position," interrupted Antoinette, her lip quivering.

"There never was anything so unreasonable as these young things!" exclaimed Mrs. Reginald, looking round Antoinette's room, and appealing to an imaginary audience. "Here we are, all ready to be fond of her, if she will let us. Anyone can see that John—well, never mind, there is no girl but finds that out for herself—only even John was not pleased, as I think you must have seen at luncheon."

Antoinette blushed a little, for, remembering what had passed in the garden, she did not think that anger had caused John's taciturnity. Interpreting her silence as acquiescence, Mrs. Reginald resumed, convincingly—

"You are a lucky girl, I say, and all you have to do is to take your luck."

Antoinette raised her eyebrows.

"Really, Mrs. Reginald," she said, a little drily, "I do not know what luck you mean."

"You don't know!—you don't know!" hotly retorted the elder lady—"I say you do know, you little cheat! Why, what greater luck can a girl have than to get the chance of a man who is the very soul of truth and honour—of a man who would die rather than do a mean thing?"

Antoinette turned very pale, and, knitting her fine dark eyebrows, looked through the window.

"It is a pity such goodness should be thrown away upon me," she said, somewhat bitterly. "I am not good or pious enough——"

"And why are you not?" interrupted Mrs. Reginald, who seemed unable to hear her to the end.

"Oh! Mrs. Reginald, I have told you that my reason——"

"Nonsense!" again interrupted Mrs. Reginald. "Reason is a very fine thing, but we cannot test everything by it. I knew an ignorant peasant once who would not believe in the Antipodes. His reason and his senses both told him that this thing could not be. What, this flat earth round!—men and women topsyturvy! No, no, Patsy was too clever to take

that in. My dear, reason alone never yet taught us anything, neither science nor religion. No sane person seeks science unscientifically, but ninety-nine out of a hundred seek religion irreligiously. I could laugh at them, if it were not so very, very dreary. Humility is the A B C of all religion, and he or she who asks God otherwise than as a child seeks its Father will never find Him."

Antoinette had never been so spoken to before, and she looked at Mrs. Reginald with some wonder in her eyes. She was impressed, and yet she scarcely understood language so strange and new.

"Well, Mrs. Reginald," she objected, "what is one to do with one's reason?"

"Reason again!" interrupted the lady—"why, you obstinate creature, what is reason? Don't you see that it varies in individuals, and is modified by all the accidents of birth, education, and life? Does not one man's reason tell him that there is a God, and another man's reason assure him that there is none? Besides, do you love right and hate wrong? There, don't look offended. I only want to tell you this: If Reason be your only moral code, it goes neither far nor deep. The purer, the nobler part of man—that part which will suffer for God, for country, for justice, ay, even for

the lovely flower of honour—has not much to do with mere reason, my dear. For reason has no right to condemn us to sacrifice, and what is more, reason has never done it; so, if you go by reason, you may certainly avoid foolish things, but you will never do great ones, and, what is almost as bad, you will be incapable of recognizing and admiring greatness in others. There, that will do for to-day,” she added, rising, and perceiving Antoinette’s sad, depressed look; “you will soon find out practically the truth of what I say. Now I do not want to be uncharitable,” continued Mrs. Reginald, “but you know, my dear, that there is nothing like a comparison for showing forth the truth. Well, then, just imagine Mr. Black arguing on that subject! Why, I can hear the man talking: ‘My reason requires that I should have money, but my reason forbids me to be dishonest, for society punishes dishonesty, and so I must get on, and not steal.’ That is what reason would tell little Mr. Black.”

Antoinette gave Mrs. Reginald a scared look. That lady’s antipathy for Oliver was so unreasonable a feeling, that she had almost ceased to care about it; but Mrs. Reginald’s guesses concerning him were often so keen and shrewd that they appalled the girl’s heart. Were they mere guesses, or did Mrs. Reginald know anything?

"I wonder what the little fellow would say on all these topics," musingly continued Mrs. Reginald. Oliver was by no means short, but his enemy invariably stigmatised him as little. "I once knew a Mr. Poole who would have it that his first great-grandfather had been a monkey. It was evidently a comfort to him to think so. Well, I did wish he had a tail, for his sake; he would have liked to wag it, poor mean fellow! I believe they have given up the monkeys now. I daresay little Mr. Black thinks he came from an Ascidian jelly-bag."

Antoinette felt as if this were beneath her anger; but she could not help looking Mrs. Reginald in the face and saying, with some scorn,

"What can Mr. Black have done to you that you so hate him, Mrs. Reginald?"

"Nothing," candidly replied Mrs. Reginald. "I know what you mean—that I am a dreadful old woman, uncharitable, and all that, and that, with such a bitter tongue and temper, I had better never open my lips about religion. Well, my dear, you may be right, and I am worth very little, and I really know nothing whatever against little Mr. Black. Only"—Mrs. Reginald raised her forefinger impressively, and fastened her brown eye on Antoinette's face—"only I never was mistaken but once in my

estimate of man, woman, or child; and the moment I saw John's friend, I disliked him, and thought ill of him."

Tears rose to Antoinette's eyes, and her lip quivered. She was stung and she was hurt.

"Then, Mrs. Reginald," said she, a little warmly, "it is hard to stand well with you. I mean that, as you go by your impressions——"

"You little goose!" interrupted Mrs. Reginald, smiling down at her very kindly, "what have *you* to do with Mr. Black? And don't you see that I like you?—and don't you understand that it is because I like you that I have been talking you over all this time? And do you know why I like you? Why, because your mother was an O'Donnell, and because you are not a doll, like Mademoiselle Basnage."

"Whom you have never seen," said Antoinette, who could not help smiling.

"Never mind, I know she is a doll. And now let us kiss and be friends. Why, you still look cross! You surely do not mind all I say about Mr. Black? It is nothing to you, is it?"

Antoinette coloured deeply.

"What should Mr. Black be to me?" she asked, in some trepidation. "It is only because it seems so unjust——"

"Never mind about the injustice," coolly retorted Mrs. Reginald. "If he stays long with

us you will find him out ; and so will John," she ominously added—"so will John, my dear."

And, without seeming to notice Antoinette's look of confusion and dismay, she emphasized her words with a nod, and thus left her.

CHAPTER IV.

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"Nine o'clock," she now thought, closing her door very softly—"it can't be far from nine. I had better not keep aunt waiting."

She was soon ready. She stole out on tip-toe, locked her door, and slipped downstairs. She met no one; and passing by the door of Mrs. Reginald's sitting-room, she reached the hall safely. The gas burned there with a clear bright light, which fell on the black and white marble floor. Antoinette looked at the doors around her. They were all closed and silent. Swiftly and noiselessly she opened that which led to the garden, and took out the key, which she put into her pocket. To her infinite relief no creaking of the hinges betrayed her, and she stood safe and free outside. She remained thus awhile to gather breath, for her heart beat so that she felt almost stifled; then like a shadow she flitted along the path, watching fearfully the gleam of light that stole out from the library windows, and fell on the sward. John was there then, and not with Mrs. Reginald, as she had thought. What an escape she had had! The rest was easy. The postern door was nothing, and Antoinette stood there till she heard a knock outside.

"Who is there?" she asked softly.

"Open," replied a low, angry voice.

"Well, but who are you?" persisted Antoi-

nette, who wanted to be sure of her aunt's identity.

"If you do not open, I shall walk round and come in at the front door," was the wrathful answer.

There could be no doubt this time that Mademoiselle Mélanie was the speaker, and Antoinette opened the door softly, peeping round it with a laughing face, on which the flaring gas-light from the neighbouring lamp-post fell.

She was slipping out into the narrow lane, when Mademoiselle Mélanie pushed her aside, and swiftly entered the garden.

"Aunt!" exclaimed Antoinette, in a low, alarmed tone, "what are you doing?"

"Well," retorted Mademoiselle Mélanie, standing still, and confronting her, "what about it? Are you afraid lest I should go to your grand friends and disgrace you."

"Oh! aunt, you know that is not it," replied Antoinette, in an agony of fear; "but, since we must not be seen, would it not be better to go away at once."

Without heeding her, Mademoiselle Mélanie walked on towards the house. She seemed to feel a perverse pleasure in exciting Antoinette's uneasiness by seeking the very peril the young girl was most anxious to shun. When she came within view of the library windows, and caught,

through the shrubs and trees, the faint gleam of light stealing forth from the half-closed shutters and falling on the grass, she said to Antoinette, who followed her, shivering with apprehension,

"What light is that?"

"It is John's light. He sits there writing," answered Antoinette, in her lowest whisper.

Mademoiselle Mélanie laughed, and the laugh, though low, sounded so distinct in the stillness of the garden, that Antoinette gave up in despair all hope of concealment. But Fortune favoured the audacious lady. She walked up and down the front of the house with reckless curiosity; then, having seen as much as the closed doors and windows would let her see, she turned back. Oh! what a sigh of relief did Antoinette breathe when they had passed the postern door, and were fairly out of the dangerous garden! With the quick reaction of the young, she laughed at her own fears, and said gaily,

"Oh! aunt, I never was so frightened in all my life. How daring you are!"

Mademoiselle Mélanie smiled in austere triumph. She was no coward; she knew it, and gloried in her bravery.

"Have we far to go?" asked Antoinette, glancing doubtfully at the narrow lane along

which they were walking. "I do not like the look of this place, do you, aunt?"

"What do I care about it?" retorted Mademoiselle Mélanie, impatiently.

Antoinette put no more questions. Their goal was soon reached, and with another sigh of relief Antoinette ran up the narrow stairs of her aunt's abode, chatting all the way.

"Now, aunt, you are going to treat us," she said; "you must, you know. What are we going to have?"

"What will you have?" asked Mademoiselle Mélanie, taking the key of her apartment from her pocket, and opening the door.

Antoinette entered the kitchen at once, opened a cupboard, looked around her, then said coaxingly,

"Oh! aunt, let us have some pancakes."

Mademoiselle Mélanie was not like the traditional conventional villain, always on the stilts of her own wickedness. Wickedness with her was very much a matter of temper, and therefore perhaps she always went farther in its ways than she had intended. Harsh and unkind though she often was to Antoinette, she nevertheless liked her as she liked nothing and no one else, so she now smiled almost kindly in the girl's face, and said pleasantly enough, "Yes, let us have pancakes."

Antoinette was delighted at this unexpected concession. She liked pancakes. Moreover, they recalled a pleasant evening in her young love, when she and Oliver had made them together in La Ruya. To make them again was almost like going back to those unclouded days of La Ruya.

"I see you have got eggs, aunt," she said; "but have you milk?—yes, quite right. Well, then, have you flour? No—yes, you have—don't you see it there? Oh! aunt, what a treat we are [going to have! But I must lose no time."

At once she set to work. She had scarcely begun, when there was a ring at the door. Mademoiselle Mélanie went and opened it, and from the kitchen Antoinette heard Oliver Black's disappointed exclamation,

"What, she is not here!"

"You will find her in the kitchen," answered Mademoiselle Mélanie, and the next moment Oliver Black's handsome face appeared at the kitchen door looking in at Antoinette.

"Oh, come and help me!" she cried—"oh, do; it will be such fun!"

"And pray what are you doing?" he asked, without coming in.

"Pancakes—come and help me."

"No, darling, not on any account. I am

afraid of the flour, and if you will take my advice," he added, rather gravely, "you will not meddle with it for the same reason."

Antoinette looked in his face with some wonder, and said, with mock gravity,

"But I am not afraid of the flour, Oliver."

"And to-morrow morning," he drily remarked, "when the maid gives a shake to Mademoiselle Dorrien's clothes, she will detect a little white spot, and having tested it chemically, she will pronounce it to be flour. Query—how comes Mademoiselle Dorrien to have anything to do with flour? The matter's submitted to the cook, the cook carries it to Mrs. Reginald, who transmits it to Mr. Dorrien, who catechises his granddaughter, who bursts into tears. On such slight accidents hang the fates of empires and of ill-fated lovers."

Antoinette laughed, but she also looked ready to cry. This perpetual secrecy was very hard to bear for one who had been accustomed to the most thoughtless liberty.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" she cried, stamping her foot in vexation, "can I not make even pancakes in peace?"

"No, darling, you cannot," retorted the inexorable Oliver; "besides, my dearest," he added, more tenderly, "I am jealous of the pancakes. They absorb your mind, they take

up your attention, ay, and your smiles, and you must think of nothing and no one save Oliver Black when he is present."

"Very well," submissively replied Antoinette, taking off the apron she had put on, and giving the mixture she had begun preparing a regretful, wistful look—"very well; but what will Aunt Mélanie say at this waste of her good things?"

"If Aunt Mélanie has the least consideration," replied Oliver, smiling, "she will kindly attend to this matter whilst we talk over our little affairs."

Antoinette did not look sanguine of this result, but she proved to be mistaken. Mademoiselle Mélanie did agree to take up her niece's deserted post, and, without even a look of ill-humour, repaired forthwith to the kitchen, leaving the door open, however—kitchens and sitting-rooms are often in close conjunction in cheap apartments in Paris—so as to hear every word that passed between Oliver and Antoinette.

A low wood fire smouldered on the hearth, a little lamp burned with a bright clear light on the table; dingy though the room was, fire, light, and evening, gave it a look of comfort.

"And now," said Antoinette, drawing her chair to one side of the fireplace, and looking

at Oliver, who was sitting down on the other side—"now, Oliver, tell me all sorts of things. No, stay where you are," she added, as he wanted to draw his chair near hers. "I like being free to look at you."

She spoke her thoughts. To look at her lover freely, openly, was pleasant, after the humiliation and restraint of her daily life. She was not one of those girls for whom concealment has any charms; she hated it as a bondage, and also as a sort of baseness, which hourly stung her pride. Oliver stroked his silky black beard and smiled.

"You are awfully pretty to-night, Antoinette," he said.

Antoinette blushed, then laughed, then looked demure.

"What next?" she asked.

"You are decidedly prettier than Mademoiselle Basnage," he continued.

Antoinette's bright eyes became riveted on him in sudden and silent wonder.

"And how do you know that?" she asked at length.

"I had the honour of dining with Mademoiselle Basnage's papa last night, and, as Mademoiselle appeared, I can form an opinion."

Antoinette still looked surprised and perplexed.

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"A great deal, I am sorry to say. This matter may separate us for a long time."

Antoinette's colour came and went; she pushed her plate away with a look of dismay.

"Oh, what was it? Were they sending him away? Would it be for long?"

He shook his head. No, that was not it, but he feared he should have to leave La Maison Dorrien. In short, he was afraid that it was no longer the firm for him.

Antoinette looked most woebegone. The gladness of the evening had departed; trouble was coming, and there was no shunning it now.

"Well," he said, desperately, "since you will know the truth"—Antoinette had expressed no such wish—"I must tell it to you. Monsieur Basnage thinks that John has persuaded Mr. Dorrien to have a paper-mill, or a factory, or a *usine*, or that sort of thing, of his own. The consequences to Monsieur Basnage will be serious, of course, for he will thus lose one of his best customers, and that was what he wanted to find out from me. I told him nothing, you may be sure. I was not going to betray business secrets to him, to begin with."

"Of course not," cried Antoinette, eagerly.

Mademoiselle Mélanie smiled grimly. Oliver resumed with perfect candour:

"Besides, I know nothing, so, as I said, I got instead of giving information. Well, the results of this scheme, which will be unpleasant to Monsieur Basnage, will simply be fatal to us."

"How so?" asked Antoinette, opening her eyes in amazement.

"Why, because all Mr. Dorrien's available capital must needs be involved in it."

"And there will be none for his grand-daughter," cried Mademoiselle Mélanie, her eyes sparkling with anger.

"Yes, that is it," said Oliver, nodding. "I did hope that, as time wore on, and you and John found out that Mr. Dorrien's plan was not to be thought of—I did hope that I might speak to Mr. Dorrien, and, putting by this cruel secrecy, openly ask him for his grand-daughter's hand; but now Mr. Dorrien could return me only one answer: 'Sir, you are penniless, and my grand-daughter is portionless. I wish you a very good morning.' In short," added Oliver, with a deep sigh, "we are worse off than ever."

Antoinette looked very grave. More grave than sorrowful, and Oliver was quick to perceive it, though he chose to ignore the fact. Mademoiselle Mélanie folded her arms across her breast, and nodding ironically at her niece's lover, asked,

"Well, and what will you do?"

"Go off to America," he answered, with a gloomy laugh, "or to California, or to Australia, or to anywhere, in short, where money can be made; and when I have a decent fortune, come back and claim this little girl, who takes it all so coolly."

A deep blush spread over Antoinette's face.

"What am I to do, Oliver?" she asked. "If I could only help you! Oh! if I could, how willingly I would do so!"

"Help me! Why, of course you can help me," he slowly replied.

"I?" And at once she looked startled and afraid. What was he going to ask of her?

"Why, yes," he pursued, studiously ignoring the look; "for you can find out from John what truth there is in all this."

"Oh! Oliver. Why, John never says a word upon business to me or to anyone."

"Could you not lead the conversation to it?"

"Oh, no, indeed I could not!"

"Say you would not!" sharply remarked Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"No, I could not," persisted Antoinette. "Indeed, Oliver, you may believe me, I cannot do it."

There was something almost pathetic in her earnestness.

"Then do not," goodnaturedly replied Oliver; "but one thing you can do, darling, without broaching the subject with John, you can find out the truth by slight tokens. Go to the library for a book; see if there be a stray letter about, an architect's card, some pamphlet on paper-mills; in short, you are too clever not to discover something or other."

"But, Oliver, what good will it do?" asked Antoinette, with an effort. "If the thing is to be, you will know it soon enough."

"Yes, but suppose that I can so manage that the thing should not be," he quietly replied. "John is the best fellow in the world, he means well, but he is awfully venturesome and ambitious. I consider this scheme of his the perdition of Mr. Dorrien's business. All his capital will be sunk in it, and in the event of a war, of a revolution, or of anything of the kind, he will have nothing to fall back upon. It is sheer madness, and, because it is madness, John will not say a word of it to me. If I only had a hint to go by, I could lead Mr. Dorrien to the subject."

"Tell him what Monsieur Basnage has said," eagerly interrupted Antoinette.

Oliver rebuked her with a look.

"My dearest, that would be downright treason."

Antoinette hung her head abashed; he resumed:

"No, I must, as I said, have a hint to go by. If I have, I can, I hope, influence Mr. Dorrien. At least, I can try. If I fail, I shall at least have done my duty, and endeavoured to save his fortune, and yours too, my poor darling!"

"Why should that John Dorrien risk the money? It is not his," here remarked Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"Of course not," replied Oliver; "he is all wrong there, but he does not see it in that light, poor fellow."

"Stand by him, do," cried Mademoiselle Mélanie wrathfully.

"Yes, I do stand by him so far as his intentions go," sturdily replied Oliver. "A more honest man than John, I do not know."

"Bah!" said she.

They did it well, these two, but inexperience is not always simplicity, and Antoinette, looking at them in some perplexity, was but half convinced. Somehow or other their speech had not the ring of true gold in her ear. She sighed deeply, hung her head despondently, and said, in a low tone,

"I am very sorry, Oliver. I am sorry that John commits such a mistake, and that I cannot

help you ; but I am too stupid. I should never know how to do it."

This was not what Oliver Black had expected, but he bore the disappointment with philosophic composure, shrugged his shoulders, laughed, said he had always thought of California as a conclusion, and the diggings as the best way of getting out of difficulties. His gaiety was forced, and his mirth rather dreary. Antoinette's tears fell slowly. She was troubled, grieved, and very unhappy. This life of secrecy, plotting, and spying was too much for a nature which was both frank and pure, and which, though touched by strange evil, was not yet tainted. Regardless of the pancakes, she laid her head on the table, and, with a smothered sob, wished that she were dead. Oliver went and comforted her at once.

"Now, darling, he whispered in her ear, "you must not. For perhaps John will give it up, or something will turn up ; in short, it may be all right."

"Then why did you worry me?" asked Antoinette, smiling up at him through her tears. "The pancakes are cold, and not good, and I dare not stay any longer, and it has all been that horrid business."

"Well, dearest," said Oliver, without detaining her, "it shall not be business the next time

you come here, and as to what I said about finding out anything, do not mind it, you might commit some fatal mistake—better not.”

“Yes,” said Mademoiselle Mélanie, smoothing down with suspicious alacrity, “better not, Antoinette, you might commit a mistake, as Oliver says.”

“You think me very silly,” said Antoinette, pouting as she put on her hat.

They both protested that they did not, but still urged her not to attempt finding out anything, lest she should give rise to suspicion.

“Very well,” she impatiently answered; “but I know you think me stupid. Of course I am,”—she remembered having said it—“and therefore, as I said, I must not meddle in this.”

Oliver laughed, made some pleasant answer, and said he would walk back with her and Mademoiselle Mélanie as far as the postern door. There was not much said on the way. Antoinette’s heart was sinking at the fear of discovery, though she would not confess her apprehensions. Had she been alone with Oliver she might have done so, for his manner to her was almost always gentle and kind; but to breathe a word to her aunt on the subject might have roused that lady to some act of daring which would have terrified the young girl out of her senses, so she was silent; but Oliver seemed to guess what her

thoughts were, for, as they stood all three at the little door, he whispered,

"Do not be afraid, darling. I shall stay here a quarter of an hour, to make sure that you are safe in."

"Oh! no, no," whispered Antoinette, turning her pale, startled face towards him. "To know that you are there would make me lose all presence of mind. Pray go—pray go away at once."

Her entreaties, though spoken low, were so urgent that Oliver could not resist them; so, merely waiting to see her open the door, which made no noise, glide in like a shadow, and close it again ever so softly, he walked away with Mademoiselle Mélanie.

They did not speak till they were fairly out of the narrow lane, and once more in the open streets, now almost silent, with their closed shops and deserted pavements. Now and then a carriage rumbled away in the distance, or the footsteps of some belated passenger were heard in the darkness; but Paris, though not asleep, was getting drowsy, and preparing for the long and deep slumber of the night.

"Well," said Mademoiselle Mélanie, getting impatient at Oliver's persistent silence, "what does all that mean?"

"No good," he answered, drily. There was

a pause; then he remarked, abruptly, "Strange that Mr. Dorrien should care so little for so charming, sweet, and winning a creature as Antoinette."

"Then you are sure he does not care for her?" said she.

"Oh! quite sure." This was spoken with a deep sigh. "One might almost imagine that he does not look upon her as his son's child."

He had waited till they came to a lamp-post to put this home-thrust, and, looking full in her face as he uttered it, he waited for her reply; but Mademoiselle Mélanie bore the look with a stolidity that defied all scrutiny, and merely saying, "This is my house; thank you, good night," she rang the bell, was admitted, and closed the door in his face, as if unaware that he had remained standing there. Oliver laughed as he walked away. Nothing Mademoiselle Mélanie said or did could affront him, but her manner strengthened rather than weakened the doubt he really entertained.

It had come, when or how he scarcely knew; sometimes he fancied he had first felt it at La Ruya on finding Antoinette so unlike a Dorrien, and also, it seemed to him, older-looking than eighteen. Sometimes he traced that unpleasant suspicion to a remark made by Mrs. Reginald in his presence.

"Surely, child, you are more than eighteen," she had said, after looking hard at Mr. Dorrien's grand-daughter. "No? Ah! well, I remember you always did look older than you were."

A few careless questions had enabled Oliver to ascertain from Antoinette herself that this "always" must refer to the time when she had come back to her grandfather's house, after her elder sister's death. Suppose she were herself that elder sister, the destitute heiress of that Count d'Armaillé, who was the boast of Mademoiselle Mélanie's life, and that it had been George Dorrien's child who had died. Would not that account for Mademoiselle Mélanie's evident affection, otherwise inexplicable to Oliver, for her sister-in-law's daughter?

"It is all very hazy," he now thought, turning away from Mademoiselle Mélanie's door, and walking slowly back to his own lodging. "She does look more than eighteen. She is girlish enough sometimes, but sometimes, too, she is quite womanly. And Mr. Dorrien does not like her, that is certain, and that Mélanie is capable of any trick. I wonder the idea has never occurred to him. Such substitution would have been wonderfully easy. Well, if she be not a Dorrien, it will certainly be found out in the end, and then it will be all over—all over indeed!"

Even without any such catastrophe coming to pass, Oliver was much inclined to think that it was all over. He had committed a mistake, and he saw it. To win Antoinette's heart, was not to win with it the certainty of Mr. Dorrien's inheritance, and of John's position. Mr. Dorrien was a cool, not a doting grandfather, and Antoinette was getting quite unmanageable. She was charming, certainly, and Oliver liked her; but suppose she were the penniless niece of Mademoiselle Mélanie, he felt that it must be all over. Something else he must try; that would never do. He sighed as he remembered how pretty she looked when setting out the pancakes; but he could bear it. If he had married Antoinette, he would have made her a very fair sort of husband. There was nothing cruel or actively unkind about him, and he had no strong hates; but he could slip off a love or a friendship much more easily than he could his gloves, which were always rather tight-fitting. He had never had but one genuine feeling in his life—his liking for his dead father. It was neither passionate nor deep, but it was true. As to Antoinette, she was charming, but so was blue-eyed Mademoiselle Basnage; and Antoinette had been growing troublesome and rather perverse of late. She had provoked him already, she would provoke him again ere he had reached

the end of his journey. The wind had been with him up to the present, but it seemed to be veering now. A squall was coming, as sure as his name was Oliver Black. Whether it would originate in Antoinette's disobedience, or in her doubtful parentage, Oliver did not know; he only knew that it would be her doing, and that he would beware of her. Now suppose she were not Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter, how could Mademoiselle Basnage be brought into play? He stood still to cogitate awhile, but soon discarded the thought with a puff of the cigar he had lit on parting from Mademoiselle Mélanie. *Cui bono?* He was not a far-seeing schemer, by any means. Life was too uncertain, too changeful for deep-laid plots, thought Oliver Black. There was but one thing to do: never to lose a chance, and to be ready for anything that might turn up.

A wide-reaching maxim, if ever there was one, and one admirably suited to men of this man's turn of mind.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN she closed the postern door and stood in the garden, Antoinette did not move for several minutes. She was dreadfully frightened, and she knew it; and she also knew that her very fear was in itself a danger. "I must be quite cool and quite calm," she said to herself, "for if I lose my presence of mind, why, I am simply undone. The first thing is to be sure that I am really alone."

It was not very likely that anyone should be wandering in a dark garden on a dreary November night, for it was now past eleven; but in her present mood Antoinette thought all things probable, and she looked about her as anxiously as if she expected Mr. Dorrien or Mrs. Reginald to appear from behind every tree. No such vision came, however. The moon had long been gone, and heavy clouds obscured the sky. The garden was intensely dark. Antoinette heard the splash of the fountain, but caught

no glimpse of its pale stone figure. She stole along on tip-toe, shivering with fear when the gravel creaked under her feet, but yet making her way to the house. When she came within view of the library windows, she saw with a sinking heart that John's light was still burning. What should she do? Suppose that in the stillness of the night he heard her opening the door, and, coming out, caught her in the act of entering the house surreptitiously! What should she do then? What should she say? That she had gone out to take the air, at that hour, on such a night as this! John would never believe her, and she should have all the shame of a useless lie!

"I cannot risk it!" thought Antoinette, in the agony of her fear. "I will spend the night here rather than undergo so bitter and so deserved a humiliation."

For with fear there came to her that remorse which is born of danger. Going out, Antoinette had only felt that she was venturing on an escapade, sanctioned by her aunt's presence, and excused by her grandfather's tyranny. But coming in she felt guilty and penitent. Oh! it was wrong, very wrong indeed to go about so at night, so wrong that, come what might, she, Antoinette, would never do it again. For what had come of it? Cold pancakes, no

pleasure, dreary business talk, and now shame and danger lying in wait for her behind that door which she would have given worlds never to have opened. In her fear she almost thought of spending the night in the garden, if, as she began to apprehend, John's vigil was to be prolonged into the small hours. At all events she would wait awhile, and see if there was no chance of his retiring before she ventured on that dreadful door.

But nothing is harder in life, in things great or small, than to follow out a purpose. When Antoinette decided upon not venturing within until John had retired, she reckoned without the changes of the night. Before she had been a quarter of an hour in the garden, the clouds which obscured the sky had melted into heavy rain; before half an hour was over, she was wet through, and stood shivering in the unavailing shelter of the house wall. She leaned against it vainly, cowering from the storm; but the wind, which drove the rain full in her face, also seemed to pierce her through, and with a feeling of despair Antoinette asked herself if she must spend the night thus.

At length John's light vanished. That little gleam, which had been so full of terror to her, suddenly left the grass, and the garden became as dark and cheerless as twelve o'clock, now

striking far away, and a rainy night, could make it. Antoinette lost no time. She stole on tip-toe to the door, and with a beating heart put in the key. It turned smoothly in the lock, but, alas! that door which, as she had ascertained, was never bolted, now resisted all her efforts. It was fast, evidently secured from within. The truth flashed across her mind. She had committed a fatal mistake. The door was not left unbolted, as she had foolishly thought. Only it was not yet secured when she looked at it at night, and it was unfastened when she saw it in the morning. "Then I must spend the night here," thought Antoinette, "and get in as best I may in the morning. I daresay I shall get my death of cold! Well, anything is better than to be found out."

But even this dreary comfort was denied her. As she turned away from the door, wondering whether the river-god would afford her better shelter than the cold and bare house-wall, the library window was suddenly thrown open, and John Dorrien walked out with a swift, firm step, like one who has a purpose. He passed by her without seeing her. He was evidently going to the postern door to make it safe. Antoinette's heart leaped with a sudden hope. Why should she not steal in through the opening he had left, and make her way to her own room

undetected and unseen? In a moment she stood within the warm library, which lamp and fire filled with comfort, and she was crossing it swiftly, when Carlo started up from where he lay curled on his master's bureau, and sprang towards her with a sharp and sudden bark, that soon changed into a glad whine of welcome. But the bark had been heard, and before Antoinette had time to reach the door that opened on the landing, John Dorrien stood by her side.

"At last!" he said. "Oh! Antoinette, never do that again—never! And you are wet through! Do you want death, then, as well as destruction?"

He was very pale, and his white lips quivered with emotion. Antoinette heard him, and could not utter one word of reply. She felt she could have died with very shame. It was not merely her return that was detected, but her absence that had been perceived all along.

"I do wish I were dead!" she cried, clasping her hands above her head in a passion of despair. "Oh! John, John, do not be hard upon me!"

He went and closed the window, then coming back to her, he led her to the fire, and taking off her wet cloak, made her sit down and dry herself.

"You are shivering," he said, pityingly, and

forgetting his displeasure as he saw the plight she was in. "Oh! Antoinette, never do that again!—never! never!"

He now spoke and looked so kindly that she felt instant relief. A while ago to be detected by him had seemed the hardest portion of her hard lot, and now she was so sure of his help and protection that she thought nothing of it. Of course he would not betray her, of course he would help her out of this danger, and of course, being so good and kind, her friend—had he not always said so?—he would forgive her folly and keep her counsel.

"John," she said, looking earnestly in his face, "I went to see my aunt Mélanie."

"Yes," he answered, looking at the fire, "I know you did."

She wondered in silent anguish what more he knew, but of this John said very little. He had had to go out himself by the back-door, he remarked, and he had seen her with her aunt walking a few yards before him. It was not difficult for him to guess how she had gone out, and how she meant to come in. He had sat up for her, he added, but she had tried the door so softly that the attempt had escaped his ear. "I am grieved that you should be so wet," he continued, regretfully; "but it never occurred to

me that you would stay out in that rain. Was I not your friend, Antoinette?"

"Oh! John, forgive me!" she entreated, "I shall never do it again—never!"

"Do not, for another time you might be detected, and that would be sad."

He said no more, put no questions, and he uttered no reproaches. That she should dry her wet feet seemed his chief thought.

"If you could have a fire in your room," he said regretfully; "but that is impossible. How you shiver! Wait a while, I shall bring you some wine."

He started up, and was gone before she could remonstrate.

"He does not believe me, or, at least, not half believe me," said Antoinette to her own sad heart; "and so whilst I was making pancakes for Oliver, and plotting against him, he was sitting up for me, and only wanted to save me from the snare I had run my foolish head into. Oh! Carlo, Carlo," she added, as the little fellow, still on the bureau, looked with a whine in her face, "you did well to give me up for him." But to be thus feelingly addressed was not Carlo's object. He wanted caresses, and, not getting these, he stretched out a paw, where-with he scratched his former mistress's shoulder.

"Then you do like me after all," softly

whispered Antoinette ; "you do like me, Carlo."

She turned her face towards the dog, and in so doing her eye fell on a broad sheet of paper lying open before her. It was covered with lines, and bore the following heading, in a round hand :

Plan de l'Usine.

All that Oliver had told her about John's plans, all that he had urged her to find out, rushed back to her mind. Mechanically she stretched out her hand as if to take the paper, then drew it back with a sort of horror at the thought of paying back John's trusting kindness by treachery so shameful. "Never, never!" she thought, turning back to the fire with a smile that seemed to defy the temptation.

Antoinette was still smiling and pacifying Carlo with a caress, when her colour, which had returned a little, died away ; she had heard Mr. Dorrien's voice in the hall addressing his young cousin.

"How late you sit up to-night, John," he was saying. "Is there extra work?" Wild with fear, Antoinette did not wait to hear John's reply, but looked about her for means of escape. If the window had still been open she would have fled out once more into the dark night ; but John had closed and fastened it, Quick as thought, she flew across the room, and opening

the door of the next apartment, closed it again on herself, regardless of the sudden darkness which she thus entered. And it was well that she was so prompt, for, without giving John time to say a word, Mr. Dorrien opened the door of the library, and entered the room almost at the same moment that his grand-daughter had taken refuge in the next.

"I thought you were out, sir," said John, when a look had told him, to his infinite relief, that Antoinette had escaped.

"No, my head ached ; I stayed within and fell asleep in my chair. You opened a door, John, and that woke me. What a good, bright fire you have—mine is out." Mr. Dorrien, who looked pale and ill, sat down in the chair which Antoinette had left vacant, and warmed his thin hands at the cheerful glow of the blazing wood.

"How is the paper mill going on ?" he asked after a while, glancing at the sheet which had caught Antoinette's eye.

"Oh ! very well indeed," replied John, with sudden animation. "Do you wish to hear anything about it, sir."

"Not to-night, I am not equal to it, John. Tell me, rather, how you are getting on with Miss Dorrien."

John stood facing his cousin. A sudden glow, which did not escape Mr. Dorrien's notice,

overspread his countenance, but he answered quietly enough :

"Miss Dorrien has not been here long, sir."

"Come, John, that is not a straightforward answer," said Mr. Dorrien, a little impatiently, "and therefore not such an answer as you should give me on this subject. I feel pretty certain," he added, with a touch of irony, "that you know how you stand in the young lady's favour."

John was silent awhile. When he spoke it was with remarkable gravity of look and manner.

"I fear I have committed a mistake," he said—"I mean that Miss Dorrien and I are perhaps not suited to each other."

Mr. Dorrien looked annoyed.

"You ought to marry, John," he said ; "you know what passed between us on that subject. I wish you had never taken that crotchet about Antoinette in your head. I wish she had never come here. I wanted you to see Mademoiselle Basnage. She is in Paris now—a charming girl, whose money would have been invaluable to us. Can you not see her, at least ?"

"But if I see Mademoiselle Basnage with that intention," replied John, smiling, "what becomes of the paper-mill ?"

Mr. Dorrien did not answer at once. When

he spoke at last it was to say rather drily,

"Are you sure that Miss Dorrien and you will not suit?"

"No," replied John, hesitatingly, and involuntarily glancing towards the door of the next room, "I am not sure—I only fear."

"Time will show," said Mr. Dorrien, rising. "Good night, John. Your fire has done me a world of good. Are you sitting up still?"

"Only for a little while longer," answered the young man.

Mr. Dorrien left him. John listened to his step going upstairs, and thought how slow and heavy it was getting. Not till it ceased did he venture to open the door of the next room. He went to it, lamp in hand, but no token of Antoinette did he see. He called her softly; she did not answer. She was gone, evidently; but how had she escaped? A blast of wind, which stirred the curtains of a window looking on the court, and which nearly extinguished his lamp, made the mystery clear. Antoinette had gone out that way. He closed the window, crossed the library, and tried the front door. It was ajar. Antoinette had evidently jumped down into the court, stolen up the *perron* steps, and opening the house-door, which had been left unbarred for Mr. Dorrien, made her way upstairs to her room. If John could have doubt-

ed that such was the case, he was convinced of it when, going up to his own apartment, he saw a gleam of light coming out from beneath the threshold of Antoinette's chamber. With a sigh of relief he passed on.

CHAPTER VI.

“IS she better?”
“Not much.”

A pause; then Mrs. Reginald's voice resumed, drily:

“A very odd cold, John. Very odd to leave one's window open, at this time of the year, and never find it out till the morning.”

John did not answer. Mr. Dorrien's voice was heard below, and this brief dialogue, which took place on the stairs near the door of Antoinette's room, ended abruptly. But the door was ajar, and though both Mrs. Reginald and John spoke low, not a word escaped Antoinette's ear; she tossed restlessly in her bed, and turned her flushed face to the wall as Mrs. Reginald looked in at her to say kindly,

“Well, dear, do you want anything more?”

“No, thank you,” answered Antoinette, in a low tone, but without looking round.

“John sends you Carlo to keep you company,” pursued Mrs. Reginald.

"John is very kind," said Antoinette, with a deep sigh; "but I do not think Carlo cares to be with me."

Carlo wagged his tail, as if in denial, and jumped up on the bed of his former mistress, favouring her so far as to lick her hands; then, lying by her side, he looked up in her face with a grave, wistful look.

"John is very fond of that little ball of white wool," resumed Mrs. Reginald, "and Carlo is very fond of John. We thought the creature would fret to death when John was away before you came."

Antoinette did not answer. She was evidently in no mood for conversation. Mrs. Reginald waited awhile, bustled about the room, stirred up the fire, put a chair in its place, then left the sick girl. She closed the door softly, and went downstairs.

"I suppose she overheard me. Well, I do think it odd to leave one's window open on such a night as that was, and never find it out till one wakens up in a raging fever in the morning."

Chastisement rarely fails to tread in the very footsteps of our sins. So Antoinette had found it. In the first place, she was very ill; in the second, Mrs. Reginald's evident incredulity was so keen a sting to her young pride that she

did not know how to bear it. "Péché caché est à moitié pardonné," says the French proverb, whether meaning that the absence of scandal really diminishes the heinousness of sin by not spreading its contagion, or because it intends to convey the low moral lesson that wickedness is essentially a matter of opinion, such we know was Oliver's theory; but Antoinette's conscience had never given full consent to the convenient doctrine. Yet impunity might have warped her moral sense, as it does that of so many others; and it was good for her that, though John saved her from the shame of discovery, he could not guard her against the bitterness of suspicion.

"Mrs. Reginald does not believe it," thought Antoinette; still tossing in her bed; "who would? Of course I did not leave my window open for the rain and damp to come in; of course she feels that I have told an untruth, and of course she suspects what the truth is. And John? John, who knows it, what must he think of me? John, who is so different from what I am."

Yes, John Dorrien was very different indeed from Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter. His life was pure, austere, self-denying, and open as the day. When she compared herself with him, and felt how mean a part she was playing, and

how incapable he was of such baseness, she felt more than humbled—she felt taught. God's grace was so far with her still that she did not ask circumstances to bear the burden of her sins. She knew she could have acted differently. She also knew that she was not naturally base and ungenerous. Yet she had fallen so easily into temptations that did not seem as if they could come near him. How and why was this, if it was not that John Dorrien had a higher standard than she had. John Dorrien was a very good young man, but he was by no means perfect. There were gleams of temper, of self-reliance, of love of approbation, of wilfulness in John, which showed him to be one of sinning Adam's sons. Antoinette had seen all these traits in him, but she had seen also that, when it came to actions, it was impossible to suspect John of any not clear, open, and upright. A strength not all his own upheld him. It bore him through temptation and trial; and, with a woman's quickness of perception, Antoinette saw that too. Alas! why had she not got that strength? Oh! hard was the lot that ever denied rest, that cast her, most unwilling mariner, on stormy, adverse seas, and never let her reach that haven of peace whence John looked down at her with a pity so humiliating to modesty and pride. That sense of mortifica-

tion and shame which his kindness had suspended, had wakened anew in the solitude of her sick-room. Antoinette could have groaned aloud in the bitterness of her regret and her abasement. Why had she done this? Why had she run such a dreadful risk? After all, Mademoiselle Mélanie could not compel her; Oliver Black, who so wished for secrecy, had no right to purchase it at her expense. Oh! why had she been so foolish? And on the question followed the fervent resolve never to run such a risk again, never to put herself in that terrible position.

Such thoughts as these do not make a day spent in a sick-room seem short. Sad and long was this day to Antoinette, even though towards its close Mrs. John Dorrien kindly came in to sit with her.

"Well, dear," said she, taking her post at Antoinette's bedside, and producing her work, with the evident intention of remaining—"well, dear, how do you feel now?—better? I am so glad. You have been poorly so long that it has made us all anxious. Did you like the books John sent you? He chose them himself; they are favourites of his."

Antoinette languidly replied that John was very kind, but that her head ached, and so she had not read the books.

"Headaches are cruel things," said Mrs. Dorrien. "I used to have dreadful headaches when John was a child. The dear little fellow was such a good nurse."

Her voice sank tenderly as she recalled her son's boyhood. Antoinette heaved a deep sigh, and said despondently,

"I suppose John was always good. Some are, and some" she added, gloomily, "are always wicked."

"John was good," quietly said Mrs. Dorrien, "but he had a temper, and I was very strict with him. John is naturally too self-reliant and obstinate, and rather passionate, but he has a high sense of honour—he had it even as a child; and he never could do a mean thing—that saved him from many a fault; but I was very strict with John, though you would not think so now."

"Do you think it gave him much trouble to be good?" asked Antoinette.

"It would have given him more to be wicked," answered John's mother, with a shrewd smile; "but it did give him trouble to be good—it always does, my dear. I like neat sewing, and so, I daresay, do you, but it cannot be done without trouble."

"He is very clever—I mean, he knows a

great many things—did that give him trouble too?”

“Of course it did. John was always ambitious, and he worked hard. Mr. Black, who is clever too, though not so much as John, did not like work, and could not stay at the Abbé Vérán's. Mr. Ryan, the English teacher, thought so much of dear John's poems, and they were so beautiful! There is nothing finer in Milton.”

“John's poems! Oh! do let me see them!” cried Antoinette, eagerly. “Are they printed? —are——”

“Burned, my dear,” interrupted Mrs. Dorrien, with plaintive earnestness. “When John felt that he must take to business, that he must fill his dear father's place in this house, and become Mr. Dorrien's support, he burned his poems that he was so proud of—he burned them with his own hand. The dear boy! I was lying ill in bed, as you are now, and he stood there, as it were, near the fireplace, and the light of the fire shone on this dear boy's face when I saw him thrust the packet into the fire. He laughed, but it tried him sorely, and I am sure that many a time after that, when he was so grave for a lad of seventeen, he was thinking of his beautiful verses, and of the man he might have been. It was a great sacrifice, and,” added Mrs. John Dorrien, with a voice

that faltered slightly, then her dim eyes kindled, "it was a noble thing for a boy to do."

"He burned them?" repeated Antoinette slowly. "John must have a very strong will."

"Yes, dear, he has; he seldom gives up what he has once set his mind on. That has given him great influence over Mr. Dorrien," added John's mother, with imprudent pride. "How flushed you are, dear!—are you better?"

"So much better," eagerly answered Antoinette: "Do you know, Mrs. Dorrien, I think I shall get up."

"Do, dear—John will be so glad to see you again," answered the fond mother, who, if one could hold a conversation with the sun, would have said as much to him about his getting up in the morning.

So Antoinette rose and dressed herself languidly, and being alone, did not go down at once, but sat by the fire, and, looking at its dying embers, thought of John burning his poems. How hard he must be at heart!—how severe to be thus early capable of self-renunciation!—and, inevitable and galling conclusion, how he must despise her!

She leaned her cheek upon her hand, and looked round her room. It seemed very long ago since she had entered it first, and been rather wearied with John's praises, uttered by

his mother's lips. On her table lay the little paper-weight, that exquisite toy which he had selected for her. Those Palissy vases were his choice, too. Hers had been, so far as he went, the tender welcome of a young betrothed in her new home. She felt it now, and remembered how it had offended her then—how scornful she had been of his presumption! Alas! she did not feel scornful as she brooded over the past; she only felt ashamed and humiliated. She did not want John's affection, but it was hard to lose his esteem, and deserve the loss.

A low whine broke on her sorrowful meditations. She looked, and saw Carlo, who had got tired of her company, scratching at the door to get out. John's voice, which was heard in the hall below, increased the dog's impatience, and his entreating whine became a loud and indignant bark of remonstrance.

"Oh! you may go," impatiently said Antoinette, opening the door for the dog—"go to that perfect John by all means, Carlo."

Carlo, quite indifferent to the scornful emphasis of her voice, trotted downstairs, wagging his tail with pleasure at his release.

"I detest John!" thought Antoinette, with a sudden revulsion of feeling; "he takes everything from me—even that poor little dog's liking. Yes, I detest him!"

It was in this altered mood that she went downstairs. The dinner-hour was nigh, and Antoinette at once entered the sitting-room next the dining-room. She had a vague hope that she might find Oliver there, but in his stead she found Mrs. Reginald, who uttered an exclamation of pleased surprise on seeing her.

"Why, who would have thought it!" she cried. "I fancied you were going to keep your bed for a week yet."

Antoinette demurely replied that she was almost well—at least, much better.

"Yes, my dear," kindly said Mrs. Reginald. "You are better, I am happy to see it, and better you must keep."

"Oh! I am so much better," answered Antoinette, smiling, "and it does feel pleasant, Mrs. Reginald, to be down here again."

"Of course it does. Let me tell you that amongst the pleasant things of life home is one. And this is your home, dear; your grandfather's house to begin with, and—of course you know it—your own later, if you like it."

Antoinette's pale face became crimson, but she looked at her hands folded in her lap, and said not one word. Mrs. Reginald resumed:

"You see, my dear, young people think they know all about love, and marriage, and the truth is, they do not. Now if you went to market for

a bird to put into a cage, which would you buy first, the cage or the bird?"

"The cage," answered Antoinette, after a moment's thought.

"Why so, dear?"

"Lest the bird should escape, Mrs. Reginald."

"Just so, and you would get a good cage with strong wires, and no weak places, such a cage as your bird could never get out of. Well, my dear, love is the bird, and marriage is the cage. If you get your bird first, there are many chances that you will not have time to choose the right sort of cage to put him into, and so he may fly off with himself, and you will never catch him again. Whereas, if you provide yourself with a good strong cage, and put your bird into it, why, my dear, you must be very careless if he ever gets out."

Antoinette looked gravely in her face—then said,

"But what if I never get the bird to put into the cage, Mrs. Reginald?"

"Why, then, my dear," briskly replied the elder lady, "you will still have a good, first-rate cage for your money."

"A cage and no bird!" exclaimed Antoinette, looking somewhat dismayed.

"Yes, it is hard," said Mrs. Reginald, gazing

at the fire, and speaking a little huskily, "it is hard to look at the empty cage, and to think, 'Oh! my bird, who was so bonny, and who sang so prettily once on a time, why did you fly away for ever and ever, and leave me a poor lone woman, for the world to laugh at!'"

She had reversed the case, but Antoinette did not remind her of it. She crept up gently to the spot where Mrs. Reginald was standing on the hearth, and stole her little soft hand within that lady's bony fingers. Mrs. Reginald was neither young nor beautiful, and it seemed strange that she should ever have thought of love as of an abiding guest, but she had a warm heart and keen feelings, and she had cast upon the faithless waters bread that had never returned to her outstretched hand.

"My goodness!" suddenly cried Mrs. Reginald, "I never thought about poor dear Mrs. John's jelly. Poor dear! poor dear! No jelly!"

And in a moment she was gone, leaving Antoinette standing alone on the hearth, looking down at the fire, and turning over Mrs. Reginald's parable.

"I caught my bird first," thought Antoinette, with a sigh, "and I left the cage to chance, and chance is not sending it, and it is weary work keeping a poor fluttering bird in one's hand all

that time, especially when not a soul must know about it, when no one must ever hear it sing, or catch a blink of its little bright eye!"

Antoinette's own eyes, those soft, dark eyes which were the charm of her young face, were dim at the thought. She had not time to linger over it. The door opened, and Oliver came in. He cast a swift look round the room, then came to her with open arms. Antoinette shrank from him with startled looks.

"Is anyone there?" asked Oliver, in dumb show.

"No, no," she answered, audibly; "but, oh! Oliver, this must not last. I mean this fear of discovery. It would kill me."

"Dearest, you do not know how I have suffered," he answered, soothingly. "To know you ill, to guess that coming out to your aunt's had been the cause, and to be powerless, not even to be able to show the anxiety I felt—it was dreadful."

He spoke quite pathetically, and Antoinette held out her hand, and looked at him with kind, pitying eyes.

"Poor Oliver!" she softly whispered; "but we must never do it again—oh! never!"

"What! does anyone suspect?" asked Oliver, with a suddenly anxious look.

"Suspect!" she echoed. "Oh! Oliver, the

door was locked, and—and it was John who let me in.”

The shame of that moment seemed to live over again, and she buried her face in her hands as she thought of it. She could not see the sudden pallor which overspread the countenance of her lover as she made this disclosure.

“Well,” he said at length; but by the time he spoke the word he had recovered his composure.

“Well,” said Antoinette, looking up, “he had seen me with aunt in the street, it seems, and he actually sat up to let me in. He was very kind—he always is; he put no questions; he went to look for some wine for me, for I had waited in the garden till I was very wet; but, whilst he was away, I vowed from the bottom of my heart never more to run such a risk.”

“Of course not,” replied Oliver, wondering at her simplicity; for of course to commit the same imprudence over again was not to be thought of. “But where were you, darling, when he went to look for the wine?”

“In the library,” answered Antoinette; “he found me out so. I was standing in the garden, and Carlo——”

“Confound the little beast!” interrupted Oliver, impatiently; “but that is not what I mean,” he added, in another tone. “When you

were in the library, dearest, I hope you made your opportunity good, and found out something about the paper-mill."

His eager black eyes were fastened on her face with a look so searching that Antoinette shrank before it. A strange feeling of fear came over her; a feeling that conquered even her indignation at the suggestion Oliver's question implied. At length she looked up, and said as bravely as she could,

"Do you mean that whilst he was getting me wine to warm me, as I stood shivering, I should have searched among his papers for the information you wanted?"

"Yes," composedly answered Oliver, ignoring the resentful tone in which she spoke. "I do not suppose you could ever have a better opportunity than that."

"Oliver, how could I be so base?" asked Antoinette, in a low tone.

A flash, as of lightning, shot through Oliver Black's laughing eyes. Their pupils contracted, and their look became so fell that Antoinette's cheek blanched; but that look was so brief that she wondered if the changing firelight had not deceived her. Indeed she might well put the question to herself. He laughed so pleasantly in her face, he looked so thoroughly amused.

"Why, dearest," said he, softly, "you cannot mean that such a foolish scruple would stop you?"

"Foolish!" she repeated, bewildered.

"Yes," said he, still laughing softly; "for where would be the harm?"

"Where?"

"Ay, where? I do not ask you to injure him, my darling. I only inflict one injury upon him, and that I cannot and will not repent."

"You need not," said she, with imprudent frankness; "he does not want me."

She knew nothing of men, this Antoinette. She did not realise the strange sad fact that a woman is never dearer to a man than when some other man seeks her.

"He has spoken to you," said Oliver, quickly.

"Oh! no; but I know it."

There was a pause. A step on the staircase warned them to be careful. Antoinette took up a little hand-screen, and looked at the Chinese lady depicted thereon. Oliver admired the roses in a vase on the table. "Rare at this time of the year," he murmured, in the languid tones of a man of the world; but the bit of acting was not needful, the step passed by the door, and the pair were not interrupted.

"We must lose no more time," he resumed, in a cool, practical tone. "You may have other

means of procuring information, which you will not object to; and of course you will avail yourself of them."

Antoinette was silent.

"You must," he insisted, not harshly, though very gravely; "our whole future now hangs on a few precarious chances, which we must seize. I have always heard that Fortune favours the brave—a saying which I read thus: That young flirt has a kindly feeling for venturesome spirits; she sits blindfolded on her wheel, and scatters her prizes right and left, seeming quite impartial, but she is not. She can peep through her bandage, and aim at some, whilst she leaves others by; and these 'some' are not, as a rule, the prudent, my dear, they are the audacious."

"And so that is your creed!" exclaimed Antoinette, in a low sad tone—"that is your creed, Oliver!"

"My dear," he coolly answered, "if you want dogma, and all that sort of thing, go to John Dorrien. He has them at his fingers' ends—his Bible, his Fathers of the Church, his Spiritual Combats and Gardens encumber his table. I declare I admire him prodigiously. I can only get through the newspaper and a French novel now and then; yet he, wonderful young man,

goes through them all, and attends to business as well!"

Antoinette heard him, and felt very heart-sick. She felt, too, that her love had embarked in a boat so light that it would soon be swamped by life's bitter waters, and she made a desperate effort to save it from final wreck.

"Do not, Oliver," she entreated, with something like pathos. "I cannot bear to hear you speak so."

"My dear girl, I will not," he said, with his pleasant smile. "I have no wish to worry you with my opinions. I am not at all like your pious people—I never tease anyone about these things. You will do me the justice to acknowledge that I have never interfered with you."

He said it so plausibly that she stared at him in amazement.

"But you told me there was no God!" cried Antoinette, with unpolished bluntness of speech.

Oliver looked horrified, and raised his handsome hands deprecatingly.

"Why, you little heathen," he said, "you don't mean to say you do not believe in what you call God, and I—well, let us say a first Great Cause. Of course there is something, only I contend that no one knows what that something is; and really I do not see any neces-

sity for such knowledge. I can get on very comfortably without it."

Antoinette felt too miserable to answer him. Was this the love she had dreamed of—this terribly cynical talk, with a "darling" and a "dearest" here and there to sweeten its bitterness.

"Oh! Oliver," she said, pitifully, "have you nothing else to say?"

Her look softened him.

"My dearest," he said, almost fondly, "what am I to say? We seem to be at cross-purposes. I want to have you, and I seek for the only means in my power. Lend me a helping hand, and all will go well, and we shall be as happy as the day is long. But remember that golden opportunities are scarce, and that it is a rare mercy if we have not been interrupted ten times, and that we are losing moments more precious than diamonds, in foolish talk. Let us at least agree on something. You have heard of Mr. Brown's Morghens, which I am to get accepted by the Museum of Saint Ives? That is a very safe subject. Whenever I talk of them, *you* will know my meaning, though no one else can even guess it."

"I don't understand," said Antoinette, looking bewildered.

"Dearest, it is so easy. If I say 'I am dis-

appointed about Mr. Brown's Morghens; I thought to get on better at Saint Ives,' you will know there is a hitch. If, on the contrary, I praise Mr. Brown's Morghens, why, you will conclude that I am progressing, as I am sure to do, if you will but help me, you perverse darling."

"What am I to do?" asked Antoinette, with a wearied sigh.

"Oh! if I tell you it will be the old story. I want you to get me information concerning the paper-mill, that is all. It can injure no one," he added, emphatically—"no one, on my word, and it will really be rendering a great service to your grandfather."

Antoinette heard him out patiently; then, burying her face in her hands, she communed with her own heart.

"Shall I, or shall I not?" she thought. She was very weary; she longed for liberty, for love openly confessed, for something like happiness. And, after all, why should Oliver deceive her? Perhaps he did mean well, and that John was unconsciously rushing to ruin, and binding down her grandfather's house to some imprudent scheme pregnant with destruction. What if she were to yield, and please Oliver by making at least the effort, which was all he asked from her. She looked up. Her

colour came and went, her lips quivered.

"My darling," said he, taking both her hands in one of his, "you will do it—I know you will."

"I will die first!" said Antoinette, looking with a proud smile in his face ; for youth, which thinks death so remote, is ever ready to brave it, and even as he spoke, the baseness of the treason had risen before her in all its nakedness.

"Oh! very well," replied Oliver, with a resigned air, "I must think of something else. These are hot-house roses, of course," he added, carelessly, as the door opened, and Mrs. Reginald walked in.

CHAPTER VII.

AUTUMN had set in that year with the severity of Winter. The end of October was chill and overcast, and November had borrowed the icy mantle of December, and wore it trimmed with a fringe of snow. To Antoinette, fresh from the south, where the roses blossom in the garden, and the oranges ripen on the tree through all the Winter months, the change was mournful and depressing. She looked despondently at the dull and cloudy sky, shivered when she was asked to go out, and watched the fall of sleet and rain, intermingled with snow, with looks full of dreary wonder.

"There never was such a climate," she said to Mrs. Reginald; "it is all cold, or wet, or frost, or snow, and not a bit of sun."

Mrs. Reginald's only reply to this lament was the question:

"What had you in La Ruya?"

"Blue skies, sun, flowers——"

"I do not mean that," interrupted the elder lady; "I mean, what had you in La Ruya besides the climate?—not books, not museums, not picture-galleries, palaces, or fine churches—nothing, my dear,—nothing to feed the mind. I would give all the blue skies, and all the flowers, for civilisation."

Antoinette, who was sitting in the window of Mrs. Reginald's little salon, with her cheek resting on the palm of her hand, and her eyes fastened on a grey sky, dull, cloudless, and low, smiled and shook her head.

"You don't know La Ruya, Mrs. Reginald," said she, "or you would not speak so. I had a hundred pleasures there. You can't think how delightful it is to climb the mountain-side! There is a little torrent that has not even got a name, it is so little, and which has been made to flow in a narrow bed, like a canal, with a path on one side, and a green bank, covered with the loveliest flowers, on the other. I could just stretch out my hand across and gather such a heap of them!—lavender, thyme, mint, jasmine, poppies, scabious, wild pinks, marjoram—and ferns, Mrs. Reginald; such ferns in the little rocky nooks!—hart's tongue, maiden's hair, asplenium, and others of which I don't know the names. And then to go there of an evening when the sun is set, and see the little moths

flitting about in the grey lights, to look at the beautiful gauzy flies and splendid butterflies asleep on tufts of lavender in bloom. Bees, too, are very fond of lavender, and will buzz over it by the hour. And ants—do you like ants, Mrs. Reginald? I did so like to go to a narrow place where the water flowed through some big trees, and watch the ants crossing over. What a mighty bridge it must have appeared to them! and how little the silly things seemed to guess that a wave not too big to fit in the hollow of my hand might have swamped them! And then the wild strawberries, Mrs. Reginald—think of them, and of hunting for them, and seeing them shine, red as coral, from among the green leaves! And the storms—oh! the splendid storms we had in La Ruya, when the thunder rolled in the mountains, and one heard the stones falling down into the torrents! and then to see the mists come and go, and the loveliest white clouds lie asleep on the green mountain-side! Oh, Mrs. Reginald! it was all so delightful!”

“And all in the Winter time, too,” pointedly said Mrs. Reginald, who had listened to this tirade very patiently—“poppies, ferns, bees, butterflies, and strawberries, from December to April?”

“Well, no,” reluctantly acknowledged Antoi-

nette, cooling down from her enthusiasm, "it was not in Winter time that *La Ruya* was so pleasant; but it was always pleasant—indeed it was."

"Of course it was," said Mrs. Reginald, rocking herself in her American chair—a habit to which she was prone—and looking up at the ceiling. "And is it not the old story, my dear—when we remember a face that we have loved, do we not always remember it at its best?—fresh, young, and blooming? When we remember a spot that has been dear to us, is it not always Spring or Summer there? There is no cheat like memory—none, and it is the only revenge which the poor dead Past can take against its insolent young rival, the living Present. Indeed, I look upon that hallucination, to which we are all subject, as the only way to solve many a mystery. For instance, it is the only rational explanation I can find for John's infatuation about Mr. Black. They were boys together, and John, so shrewd, so penetrating, sees his old playmate through the false, delusive prism of Memory. Poor John!" musingly added Mrs. Reginald, "to think that he should be so absurd!"

On hearing Oliver Black's name, Antoinette had changed colour, but when Mrs. Reginald came to this melancholy conclusion concerning

John's absurdity, she started nervously to her feet, and said, with a sort of hurry,

"Mrs. John has asked me for the pattern of a knitted scarf; I must go and give it her whilst I think of it."

"Do," drily replied Mrs. Reginald; and, keeping her eye fastened on the ceiling whilst Antoinette was leaving the room, she said to her own thoughts, "I do wonder what is on that girl's mind?"

Alas! there was a weight of care on the mind of Mr. Dorrien's grand-daughter, and it was because she could not raise it that the Paris sky seemed so gloomy, and that La Ruya became as a lost Paradise. "Oh! that I had never left it—that I had never come here!" she thought ten times a day. The net she had so foolishly entered was closing round her more and more, and whilst her freedom was inextricably caught in its meshes, love, alas! was slipping out through every loophole. She did not know it yet, for, when the heart is true, such knowledge is slow to come; but she did know that she dreaded the chance of seeing Oliver alone—that she shunned it as we shun what is dangerous and baleful, and that, when they met in the presence of others, his eye, however smiling his countenance might be, watched her with cold mistrust. And most justly was it so.

The love that rests on falsehood and deceit carries within it the poison that dooms it to a death which may be sudden or lingering, but which is sure.

Careful though Antoinette had been to avoid anything resembling a private interview with her lover, she had neither shunned all intercourse with him, nor wished to do so. She had written to her aunt a few lines, half penitent and half afraid, in which she explained that Oliver was not to be angry if she could not do as he wished. And once, on the staircase of La Maison Dorrien, and another time in the drawing-room, when Mr. Dorrien gave a formal dinner, to which Oliver was asked, they had exchanged a few hurried words, which had filled Antoinette with terror, for the first time, Mrs. Reginald, suddenly coming out of her own apartment, had given the pair a sharp, inquiring look, and the second time she had met John's earnest eyes fastened on her with a long reproachful gaze, or one, at least, which her conscience so construed. Ever since then the mere mention of Oliver's name by either Mrs. Reginald or John Dorrien had been to Antoinette a cause of alarm which she could not conquer, even though nothing had ever occurred to justify its existence. It was therefore quite enough that Mrs. Reginald introduced this un-

welcome topic on this November afternoon for Antoinette to hasten out of her presence in sudden fear, and to feel that she could not be too far out of the reach of her searching brown eye, or of her sharp, probing speech.

The trite wisdom which the ancients embodied in their celebrated saying, "From Charybdis to Scylla," never grows stale in the experience of daily life. That imaginary peril which Antoinette had left Mrs. Reginald's presence to shun met her at Mrs. Dorrien's door. Scarcely had she reached it, when Oliver Black appeared by her side. She looked at him mute and frightened. He gave a quick glance round, then whispered, "John is below," and aloud he added, "Such glorious news about Mr. Brown's Morghens, Miss Dorrien! You will be glad to hear them, I know."

"Oh, yes," answered Antoinette, faintly, "but not now—I am in a hurry."

She hastily entered Mrs. Dorrien's apartment as she spoke, and was laughingly followed by Oliver.

"If you want to shun the Morghens news, Miss Dorrien," he coolly remarked, "you are, as it were, rushing into their very jaws. I am bringing them to Mrs. John."

Mrs. Dorrien rose to receive her visitors, and looked with some surprise at Antoinette's pale,

alarmed face, and Oliver's half-defiant, half-amused countenance. She had no suspicion, and yet she saw in these two something which perplexed her.

"What is it?" she asked, almost sharply—"what has happened?"

But in a moment Oliver had charmed away her dawning mistrust. With his most winning smiles, in his most delightful manner, he had entered on the theme of Mr. Brown's Morghens, and made the pleasantest little romance out of them. Mrs. Dorrien heard him, and was enchanted. It was all so nice, and Mr. Brown would be so pleased, and Mr. Black had been so kind; but John—where was John? and why had he not come up with Mr. Black?

"John was busy," answered Oliver, covertly watching Antoinette, who all this time had been moving about the room, looking for worsteds, sorting the various colours, and seeming intent upon the selection. Yet she had not missed a word that Oliver had spoken. What did it mean, or did it mean anything? The girl's heart sank within her as she listened to him. His speech had a ring of triumph in it, but then she apprehended almost equally the success or the failure of the schemes in which he had involved her. For did not success imply the ruin of John Dorrien, who had been so generous and

so true, and was not failure the death-blow to all she had hoped in ?

At length Oliver left, and she was released from the suspense in which his presence kept her.

"Such an amiable young man," murmured Mrs. Dorrien, "and so attached to my dear boy. It is to please John, you know, that he has taken all that trouble about Mr. Brown's Morghens. It is so nice to see two young men such fast friends as these are; but then John has been so kind to Mr. Black, and he knows it."

Not one word could Antoinette answer, but, turning almost deathly pale, she went up to the fireplace, and, standing on the hearth, looked down at the blazing logs. "He burned his verses here," she thought, "and that is his reward, treason—treason! Is it always so in life, I wonder? Are there some who sow, and others who reap?"

She pondered over the question, whilst Mrs. Dorrien went on with her small talk. It haunted her whilst she was knitting Mrs. Dorrien's scarf, and it was with her still, as she sat at dinner next to John, and heard him laugh gaily—Mr. Dorrien and Mr. Brown were not present—at Mrs. Reginald's comments on the Morghens.

"Poor Mr. Brown," she said, pathetically. "I

suppose he would have petrified if it were not for these Morghens. I suppose all men want something to keep them alive. With the young it is love, or pleasure, or that sort of thing; and with the old it is Morghens, or medals, or autographs, or any other hobby "

"And the ladies, Mrs. Reginald," said John, "what have the ladies got to prevent them from petrifying?"

"Needlework, to be sure. Oh! you may laugh; it is a wonderful invention, for is there not stitching, back-stitching, felling, hemming, herring-boning, darning, and all the rest of it? There is nothing like needlework, John."

John laughed. How light-hearted and happy he seemed, whilst she, miserable Antoinette, felt oppressed with care. The mere mention of the Morghens made her heart ache, and when, after dinner, Mrs. Reginald wanted her to join them in her sitting-room, she excused herself.

"My head aches," she answered, and on that plea she went up to her room. The weight of life was upon her, and it seemed more than she could bear. Depressed and weary, she sat down on a chair, and clasping her hands above her head, she looked before her with sad eyes that saw not. Then, little by little, outward objects stole on her inward sense. The cold, waxed floor, the white bed, the toilet-table, with

its oval mirror, in which the flickering light of her candle was reflected, grew upon her one by one, till she started to her feet in a sudden tremor: a little white note was lying on her table. She ran to it, and took it up with a beating heart. What evil, what sorrow were at hand, that he had written to her, and taken such means to convey the news which she had learned to dread?

She opened the letter of her lover with a trembling hand, read it, then coloured violently with the suddenness of a great relief, and a great joy, for all Oliver Black had written was, "All's well. Good-bye, darling, for a week."

A week's reprieve, a week's free, fearless life! Antoinette could have laughed aloud. Her dark eyes sparkled, she ran to her glass, she smoothed her hair, she settled the crimson knot in it, she smiled at herself; she felt light, buoyant, happy, and she never asked herself why she felt so. She took one or two turns round the room, came back to the glass, frowned to see that the crimson knot had got all wrong, made it all right again, then, gay and light as a bird, she slipped out of her room, and skipped downstairs to Mrs. Reginald's door. There she paused, and even standing thus alone on the dark landing, she hung her head, and felt shy and bashful, as she knocked softly and

doubtfully, and heard John's voice reading aloud.

"Come in," said Mrs. Reginald's deep tones. Antoinette opened the door, and with a coy look at the firelit group before her, said,

"Will you have me now, Mrs. Reginald."

She looked very pretty thus framed by the dark doorway, with the crimson ribbon in her hair, and the crimson knot on her breast. She half bent forward in the timid beseeching attitude of one who doubted her welcome, one hand holding the door open, the other half hidden in the folds of her dark silk dress. That soft, dainty grace which was her charm, was in her bearing and her aspect, and secured at once Mrs. Reginald's cordial greeting.

"Don't look so much like a little shy mouse, but come in," she said, kindly; "we'll not eat you."

"I hope not," replied Antoinette, with a low laugh. She closed the door and came forward, and John Dorrien met her half way, and asked about her headache. Oh! it was gone, replied Antoinette, with her eyes averted, quite gone. She was quite well again. She took the low chair he gave her, and placed it nigh his mother, who greeted her kindly, and thence she looked up at Mrs. Reginald.

"My dear child," said that lady, tartly, "you

need not look so frightened. I tell you we are not pussies going to devour you."

"I am not frightened—no, indeed I am not," said Antoinette; "and I came because I felt sure it was so nice here with you—and it is nice."

Her shy dark eyes went round the room, so warm, so glowing, so pleasant with the wind and rain without, and within the wood fire burning merrily on the hearth. Involuntarily perhaps she ended that brief survey with John Dorrien as he sat on the other side of the fireplace, leaning against the white marble mantelpiece and looking down at her. He smiled as their eyes met.

"You do not know how snug we are here," he said, "or you would come oftener and join us."

"Yes, dear," put in Mrs. Dorrien, "I wonder you so often stay in your room of an evening. It must be so dull."

"She does not come because she is a perverse mouse," answered Mrs. Reginald; "don't contradict," she added, lifting up a bony forefinger and fastening her brown eye on the young girl's blushing face. "You are a fanciful, capricious mouse; deny if it you can?"

Antoinette neither denied nor got angry. She felt too happy for displeasure. She only

bestowed one of her most winning smiles on Mrs. Reginald, and said softly :

“ Well, am I not right to stay away, if I feel naughty, Mrs. Reginald ? ”

“ Then when you come you feel good,” was the prompt rejoinder. “ Well, my dear, all I can say is this : Goodness is very becoming to you, or it is the red ribbon in your hair.”

“ Oh ! the red ribbon, by all means,” said Antoinette, becoming very rosy at the little compliment Mrs. Reginald chose to pay her looks.

But Mrs. Reginald thought it was the goodness, and said so. She also thought she would put that goodness to the proof by making Antoinette useful. She accordingly gave her a tangled skein of thread to unravel, and bade John resume his book—a popular novel. John Dorrien had a musical voice, and read well. Antoinette felt in a delightfully dreamy mood as she divided her attention between her skein and his reading. Sometimes a subtle knot claimed all her mind and skill ; and sometimes letting the tangled threads lie on her lap, she looked at the fire, and listened to the reader, and felt that she might let life go by for a while, and allow the perplexities of her lot to drop out of her memory.

“ Your mother has gone to sleep, John,”

said Mrs. Reginald, "you may put down the book. It is no great thing."

"Say you don't like novels, Mrs. Reginald," said John, as he put down the volume.

"I do like novels," answered Mrs. Reginald, decisively; "but they must be good, and there are one or two people in this story that I meet everywhere, and am tired of. I hate the mercenary young lady, and the loving one is a bore. As to the unattractive young man, so self-denying and so good, who falls in love with the beauty, and is trampled upon by her, he is my particular aversion. I prefer the villain, for, at least, no one expects me to like *him*."

"What, not like that good, unattractive young man, Mrs. Reginald?" said John.

"No," answered the lady, almost grimly: "I want to know what unfascinating people mean by falling in love with the fascinating ones, and why a man expects a girl to look over in his own case the want of those qualities which charm him in hers? The beauty is silly and heartless, and he loves her, and he actually wants her to love him because he has both heart and sense! Why does he not like a dull plain girl," asked Mrs. Reginald, with a short scornful laugh, "so good, so sensible, eh?"

"The best thing would be a story without love, Mrs. Reginald."

"A story without love! I would not give a farthing—no, nor half a farthing—for a story without love," answered the lady, warmly.

"And yet life has many thrilling and pathetic histories," began John.

"Pathetic nonsense," interrupted Mrs. Reginald; "there is no pathos without love. Don't interrupt me. I know what you are going to say. Is there only one kind of love? But shall I tell you why that love is always the love chosen?"

"Do, if you please."

"Because it is the most perfect of all loves, be sure. Friends, brothers and sisters, parents and children, all part, or may part; but man and woman, once bound by love, must cleave to one another until death divides them. My dear boy, love is the only ideal here below, the only blessing, says the marriage-service, which original sin could not take away."

"But you are talking of marriage."

"Of course I am; and what is love but marriage?—and what is marriage but love? Do you young things think," said Mrs. Reginald, glancing from John Dorrien, on his side of the fireplace, to Antoinette, on her low chair by her side—"do you think, I say, that an old woman such as I am gives up love when her hair turns grey? Do you think even that, if she happens

to have been wrecked in her day, she sits on the shore and rails at that sea which once looked so beautiful and so tempting? No, no," continued Mrs. Reginald, rocking herself in her chair, and looking at the fire, perhaps because her brown eye was dim, "one's outside and one's own hard lot have nothing to do with the truth, and if a story be not a love-story, why, it is no story at all," added Mrs. Reginald, in her coolest and most matter-of-fact tone.

John Dorrien laughed gaily; his mother woke with a little start, and Antoinette thought, "I wonder what he thinks about love!"

"And is that the fashion after which you untangle a skein?" cried Mrs. Reginald, a little indignantly, as she saw Antoinette toying with the thread on her lap.

The young girl started and blushed and stammered a little apology, and John Dorrien interfered.

"Allow me," said he; "I have a skill in unravelling."

"So you have," said Mrs. Reginald, shrewdly. "That boy would unravel anything, my dear."

John Dorrien was taking the skein from Antoinette's hands. She quickly raised her eyes to his face, with a soft, inquiring look. Yes, she could believe that those brilliant grey eyes,

so searching though so kind, could unravel the web of many a mystery.

"He knows all about me," she thought. "How little, how worthless I am! And he pities and forgives me, and cares no more about me than about the skein his hand is now taking from mine."

She was turning away with a throb of pain when he arrested her.

"Oh, but you must help me," he said. "I never could unravel alone so tangled a skein as is this."

"Then put your chair near hers, John," said Mrs. Reginald, a little impatiently, "and do not pull my skein about so, will you?"

"Let me hold it, dear," said Mrs. Dorrien, addressing Antoinette; "you look tired."

"I protest against your interfering, Mrs. John," peremptorily said Mrs. Reginald. "You look tired."

Well, Mrs. John thought she was tired, and rising, bade them good night.

"And now, whilst you two work, I'll play," said Mrs. Reginald, leaning back in her chair and covering her face with her handkerchief.

She was soon fast asleep, and, save for her sound breathing and the crackling of the wood on the hearth, the room became silent. Antoinette held one end of the skein, whilst John

Dorrien was unravelling the other end, and neither spoke.

"Antoinette," he said at length, "is there a new trouble on your mind—anything I could help you in?"

He spoke low. She shook her head, and did not answer.

"Confide in me," he urged; and this time he spoke in a whisper.

Antoinette looked at the fire.

"I have nothing to say," she answered, with sad apathy. "I wish to forget, John. I came here this evening to be happy. Why will you not let me be so a little while?"

She looked up at him. Her eyes were dim, her lips quivered, there was a pitiful, appealing meaning in her face which would have moved a harder heart than that of John Dorrien. He stooped nearer to her and looked at her earnestly.

"Antoinette," he said, "I told you from the first that I was your friend—your only friend. Why would you not have faith in me?"

"Where is the use of faith, when one's life is as tangled as that skein?" she answered, with impatient bitterness.

"You could not unravel that skein alone," he said, quietly; "but I can do it for you."

She hung her head, and made him no reply.

"You are very dear to me," he continued, "and I should like to do for you what you do not seem as if you could do for yourself. How could you, when it is with mine that the skein of your life is so inextricably tangled! Have you never felt it? Have you never understood that, to cut asunder the threads which bind our two destinies, might be death to either, or to both?"

"What death?" she asked, under her breath.

"The death of faith, of hope—of more, Antoinette."

She could not help raising her eyes to his. Her heart was pierced with sorrow, and yet it throbbed with joy.

"I am his enemy," she thought—"his mortal enemy, and he sees it; and yet he is my friend—my dear, true friend, and I see it. Our fates are mingled, as he says—tangled together, so that it is death to divide them; and I would give the world that this had never been; and yet—yet I am glad that it is so."

Something of the passionate tumult in her heart appeared in her upraised face. She leaned back in her chair, forgetting the skein on her lap. John, too, let it lie there, and read her troubled countenance very intently.

"Trust in me," he said; and again his voice

sank so low it was almost a whisper ; "trust in me, and I will make all right."

Antoinette did not answer ; she felt bewitched and dreaming.

"Do not fear," he continued, soothingly ; "fear nothing and no one, but when everything looks black and threatening, remember that I am by."

She roused herself to say :

"But what if I am against you—against myself—what can you do to serve me, John?"

She spoke with sorrowful defiance, but he only smiled.

"I am a good swimmer," he said, "and if you capsize the boat, why, I must bear you to the shore."

"Do not," she replied, turning away with a great rush of grief coming up to her dark eyes ; "if I feel myself sinking I shall cling to you as drowning people always do, and we shall both go down to the bottom, John," she added, trying to laugh.

"No, we shall not," he answered almost sharply.

"Yes, we shall," said she ; "therefore when you feel tossed into the waves think of yourself, and let me sink or swim—whatever my lot may be, I shall have deserved it richly."

"Though you had deserved it ten times," said

he vehemently, "I would perish with you rather than forsake you."

She did not love him, nor did she think that he loved her, kind though was his language, kind though were his looks, but his generous friendship touched her heart to the quick. She longed to cling to him as to a brother, and to call out from the depths of her sorrowful heart, "Oh! my friend, my friend, why did we not meet a year ago—when not a shadow need have come between our friendship!"

But she was mute; shame, pride, honour, another love kept her silent. He did not seem to require her language.

"You cannot get rid of me," said he; "we are in the same boat, you know, and sink or swim together. As to letting you go, or forsaking you in any fashion, do not think that I ever will."

She did not know how to construe his meaning. Was it that he would never forego his claim to her, or simply that, spite the mire of treachery and falsehood into which she had foundered, he would be true to her. "It must be that," thought Antoinette, "he would never steal another man's love, nor take the second place when he should have the first. He knows I am getting myself into dreadful trouble, and he will be true to me, and he will marry Mademoiselle Basnage."

They sat thus in the faded firelight glow, withits flickering light playing on their two faces; and the lamp stood behind them, and Mrs. Reginald, whom they had forgotten, was snoring in her chair. Antoinette felt languidly happy. It was pleasant to sit thus with John Dorrien, to know him so kind and true, and to be away for a little while from her trouble. That trouble would come back spite all his goodness—it would come back, oh ! how well she knew it, but it was gone for the time being, and she knew that too.

“Oh ! John,” she could not help saying, “you are so good, and your goodness does seem so to take care and trouble away.”

The light of the fervour with which she had spoken was still in her eyes, the smile her words had called up was still on his lips, her hand, which he had taken and pressed, was still clasped in his, when the door opened, and without word of warning Oliver Black entered. He paused one moment, saw Antoinette’s frightened eyes, and vain attempt to withdraw her hand which John forcibly detained, saw John’s Dorrien’s undisturbed face looking round at him over his shoulder ; then came forward with a smile on his lips, to which no gleam of light in his eyes answered :

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Reginald,” said he,

as that lady woke up with a start at the sound of the closing door, "I feel this is a terrible piece of impertinence in me, but I have not one moment to spare; if I miss the 11.50 train," he drew out his watch and looked at it, "I am undone."

"And what have I to do with the 11.50 train?" tartly asked Mrs. Reginald, sitting up.

"Why, nothing; but this John Dorrien, whom I want urgently, is in your possession. It is a case of *habeas corpus*, if I may so say, and I want him. Lend him to me for five minutes only, and I promise to return him safe and sound."

He laid his hand on John Dorrien's shoulder as he spoke thus, never once looking at Antoinette, who, pale and scared, sat staring at him in mute appeal for mercy. John Dorrien rose, his pleasant, genial face unclouded, and he followed Oliver Black out of the room.

"I am afraid I interrupted you," said Oliver coolly, as soon as the door had closed upon them, "for I believe you were actually making love to Miss Dorrien."

"Oh, no," quietly answered John; "we are good friends, but there is no love-making between us."

"And you were assuring her of your friendship when I came in?"

"My dear fellow, did you come back to catechise me about Miss Dorrien?"

Oliver Black tried to laugh, but he was ill at ease. He spoke no more of Antoinette; he talked, and at some length, of the business that had brought him back, but he could not do so with his usual careless manner. He was jealous, and Iago himself, had he been suffering from jealousy when he betrayed the Moor, could not have been self-possessed. At length he left. The two friends shook hands and parted at the head of the *perron*.

"The little traitress!" angrily thought Oliver, as he jumped into the cab that had brought him. "I know what to think of her now."

And John Dorrien, turning back into the library, thought, with a weary sigh: "Is that the skein I am to unravel?"

And Antoinette, in her room, thought, with a sort of dull despair: "I suppose it is all over now, and that I am really undone."

And Mrs. Reginald, putting on her night-cap, paused as she tied the strings, and thought: "There is something going all wrong—I know it; but though I don't know a bit what it is, one thing I am sure of—that nasty little Mr. Black is at the bottom of it."

CHAPTER VIII.

FORGETFULNESS is the happy gift of youth. Antoinette spent a sleepless night, and was depressed the next morning, but little by little she rallied, and in the afternoon she was herself again; for, after all, what had she done that Oliver should be angry with her? Her conscience acquitted her of all save the feeling of relief at his absence, and how could she help that? Whatever he might think, Antoinette knew that she did not prefer John to him. She might lament that untowardness in her fate which had put her in the position of being false to so true and so sincere a friend as her cousin, but that regret was not liking—not the liking she had given, and still gave, to Oliver. And he, Oliver, was jealous; she had read it in his eyes, in his smile, in his whole aspect. Jealous of her!—poor Oliver, how little he knew her! Oh! if she could only tell him!—if she could only explain, and make all right!—if she could only assure him that,

though she did not always obey him, she always loved him dearly, and never for a moment cared—in that way, at least—for anyone else. But surely he must know that much, and if he did not—if he kept any bitter, painful doubt on his mind, surely, too, she would find it easy to set him right when he came back. And in the meanwhile Antoinette, with her conscience at rest, and her mind undisturbed by any apprehension for that present which is so much to the young, with her heart softened towards Oliver by the thought of his secret pain, Antoinette, we say, felt at ease again, and forgot that the sky of Paris was like lead, and that the November days were short and dull; indeed, as if to justify her oblivion of the latter fact, the day which followed Oliver's departure might have been borrowed from September, it was so bright, so clear, so mellow. The baleful fog had melted away, the heavy grey clouds had vanished, and a bright warm sunshine shone in a sky of azure. The trees in the garden had not yet lost all their foliage, and their red and yellow leaves looked gorgeous in the golden light of early noon. Antoinette, looking at them from her window, felt light as a bird, and went to seek Mrs. Reginald in that lady's sitting-room.

"Oh! Mrs. Reginald," said she, breaking in

upon her, "the sun's shining, and the garden is so delightful! Will you not come down a bit?"

"Thank you, my dear, my store of rheumatism is already in. I am not like you, under the happy necessity of providing any for the future."

Antoinette was nettled. "I am sure I shall never have rheumatism," she said, almost indignantly.

"Now I like that, it is such nonsense," exclaimed Mrs. Reginald, with emphatic approval. "Don't look cross, dear; I do like nonsense. I do consider it one of the necessities of existence. Nonsense—why, it is the most delightful thing in this world. Children, young people, lovers, and clever men and women, are full of it. Wise children are not to be endured. Wise young people and lovers, ditto, ditto. As to wise clever men and women, they are simply absurd. There never yet was genius without a grain of folly. Take my word for it, dear, we all wear the cap at the best of times, and we like, or ought to like, the music of our jingling bells. 'Tis only fools—because they are born to it—that never know what sort of head-gear adorns them, and they look so solemn and so grave under it that half the time the world does not find them out."

"Then don't be too wise, Mrs. Reginald,"

gaily said Antoinette, "and come down to the garden with me."

But, spite her love of paradox, Mrs. Reginald was not inclined to perpetrate this particular piece of folly, and Antoinette had to go down and get in her store of rheumatism alone. There was a quiet charm about this little bit of green, of sunshine and blue sky, set in the stony heart of the great city, and Antoinette stood still to enjoy it and look around her.

The early frosts had nipped the last flowers, but a hardy green plant still spread its wide leaves round the edge and down the sides of a grey stone vase, and the River God looked warm and benignant in the pale yellow sunlight. A brown sparrow hopped fearlessly in the path before Antoinette, and picked up the crumbs which she had brought down to feed it. Withered leaves, which had fallen since the gardener had raked the alleys, were lying on the ground, and crackled beneath the young girl's feet as she walked on. One lighted on her dark head, rested in the plaits of her hair—for she had recklessly gone down bare-headed—and lying there, seemed the *memento mori* of Nature's sad Autumn to her youth's joyous Spring.

For she felt happy, very happy. Nothing could check the feeling just then. It rose

buoyant in her heart, as the waters in that fountain which the old navigators sought may have welled in the island lying in unknown seas, and never discovered yet by man. That November sunbeam which had pierced the Autumn sky was as potent as an enchanter's wand over the southern girl. Fear and doubt fled, and even conscience was silenced, and she was so glad that she felt really good.

So she walked on, feeding not one sparrow, but a whole bevy by this, and softly singing to herself the refrain of an old Provençal song, a far-away echo from the days of the Troubadours.

"My dear," said a voice behind her, "how can you be so imprudent? Remember this is November. You will take cold or have toothache. John would be so vexed."

So spoke Mrs. Dorrien, in a tone of maternal solicitude. She had seen Antoinette walking bareheaded in the garden, and had come down to remonstrate. The young girl turned round, and laughing, showed two rows of white teeth that feared nothing as yet from that ache against which we have the authority of Shakespeare himself for saying that no philosopher's patience is proof.

"Thank you, Mrs. John," said she; "but I am so used to go about bare-headed that——"

"Not in this climate," authoritatively interrupted Mrs. Dorrien, producing a dainty white woollen hood and cape, and putting it on Antoinette's head, and tying it under her chin.

Miss Dorrien submitted with a resigned air, and the operation was not over when an "Oh! little mother, how can you?" most reproachfully uttered, made them both look round.

John Dorrien stood by them with a look of concern on his pleasant face.

"How can you be so imprudent," he said. "Antoinette, who is young and strong, may venture out on this treacherous sunny day, but that you, who are so susceptible, should do such a thing, is really too bad."

Antoinette laughed gaily at seeing the tables thus turned on Mrs. Dorrien, whilst that lady proceeded to explain how she had been drawn down by the sight of Antoinette's delinquency; but, before she had gone through half her justification, she broke off, saying,

"My dear boy, you have had some annoyance this morning."

Antoinette looked quickly up into John's face, and saw that it was grave and clouded.

"It is only a vexation, mother," he answered, with a wearied sigh, for vexation had been a daily visitor of late, and John was getting tired of looking in her peevish face.

"Only a vexation," repeated his mother, still anxious, whilst Antoinette's heart beat at the thought that Oliver might have something to do with this. "What kind of a vexation, my dear boy? Is it something you may talk of?" she added, trying to smile. "Tell us about it, dear, if you can."

"There is not much to tell, little mother. You have heard me talk of Verney?"

"Oh! yes, that clever fellow—that genius!" exclaimed Mrs. John Dorrien, suddenly interested.

"Well, then, he has just left us, without a word of warning."

Mrs. Dorrien's face fell.

"And that is a vexation!" she said.

"Worse—it is a real trouble. We have large and pressing orders for New York. Even with him to work for us, we had no time to lose, not a day, not an hour. Without him, we may consider our orders as good as lost."

"But how did he come to do such a thing?" asked Mrs. Dorrien, with a face full of concern. "Had he no engagement with you? Can you not make him keep to it, or get him punished?"

"When we know where he is, we can certainly inflict some punishment upon him," answered John; "but by that time, little mother, where will our orders be?"

"Oh dear! oh dear!" she said, with a sigh, "what a worry all this must be to you, my dear boy! I suppose some one must have tempted him away?"

"Oh! yes," carelessly answered John, "there are plenty of people ready to take this thing up. I never thought we could keep it long to ourselves; but whilst it was ours only, it was all clear gain—now we have got a check, for we lose time, and others will try to step into our shoes."

"But who can have done it?" said Mrs. Dorrien.

"I fancy Monsieur Basnage had a hand in it," replied John. "He may have other customers who would like Verney."

"Monsieur Basnage!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrien, in a voice full of dismay. "How shameful! But I thought he was a friend of the firm. How or why did he do such a thing, John?"

"Oh! because we are not in his good graces just now," answered John, laughing. "I believe the fault is mine. You must not be so amazed, little mother, it is all in the way of business, and we cannot tax him with it, and it may not be true, either; but I must go and give Mr. Dorrien this piece of news, so good morning, little mother."

Antoinette's gladness was all gone. She

looked after him with troubled eyes. Had she any share in this mishap? Was it because Monsieur Basnage had found out anything about the paper-mill, or because John had refused to see his daughter, that he had played such an unkindly trick on his old business friends?

"Mrs. John," said she, suddenly addressing her companion, "what was it that this wonderful and wicked Verney did for John?"

"My dear, he did all the vignettes," answered Mrs. John, dolefully, "those pretty devices and emblems that you have seen on our note-paper. Oh! it is a very sad affair, and it all falls on my poor boy."

"And is that all?" exclaimed Antoinette, opening her eyes very wide. "Is it no more than that?"

"No more!" echoed Mrs. Dorrien, almost offended; "and is it not plenty? Did you not hear John saying that the firm will lose the orders for New York?—and do you know what loss means for such a firm as ours? Why, thousands upon thousands, my dear," added Mrs. Dorrien, straightening herself up.

"But surely some one else could be found to do that work in his stead," ejaculated Antoinette.

"Oh! of course, with time; but don't you see, dear, that it must be good work, well done,

and at once—at once—and this is a branch peculiar to us. Dear John started it. No one else has taken it up, and the men who could fill that horrid Verney's place are not ready yet. It is a great trouble to my dear boy, I am sure."

Antoinette was silent, and looked very thoughtful. She said not a word as they entered the house, and went upstairs; and when she spoke at Mrs. Dorrien's door, it was to excuse herself from entering that lady's apartment. Mrs. Dorrien put on a resigned air, her victim air, but Antoinette did not relent, and repaired to her own room. All she did there was to take a little Russia leather pocket-book from the drawer of her work-table. She did not venture to look at its contents, lest her heart should fail her, but slipping it into her pocket, she stole downstairs as stealthily as if she were bent on some guilty errand, and pausing at the door of the library, knocked so softly that no one, it seemed to her, could hear that timid petition for admittance. But she had been heard, for John's voice at once said, "Come in," and Antoinette, obeying the summons, found herself in the presence not merely of John, but of Mr. Dorrien. A smile of welcome broke over her cousin's face as he saw her, but her grandfather put on an air so remote that Antoinette stood mute and abashed before the two.

"I am very sorry," she stammered, "but I thought John was disengaged, and could spare a few moments."

"Certainly," replied John, "as soon as——"

But Mr. Dorrien, waving his hand, said, a little drily,

"This evening, when he is disengaged, John will be very happy to attend to you, my dear."

"I came upon business," said Antoinette gravely, for opposition at once rendered her fearless.

Mr. Dorrien stared as much as a courteous man ever can stare at a lady, even though she should happen to be his grand-daughter, then more drily than before :

"Indeed ! I hope I do not interfere."

"Oh, no," said Antoinette blushing at his pointed tone, but casting a rather imploring look at John, who immediately said in his kindest voice :

"What business is it ? What can I do for you ?"

"Oh, nothing," she quickly replied, "but I hoped I could do something for you, John. When you showed me the designs for the papers the other day, I amused myself with drawing some ; if they could be of any use, I should be so glad," she added hesitatingly.

Mr. Dorrien raised his eyebrows.

"You mean well, my dear," he began, "but you had better wait till another day, when John is more at leisure."

"Oh! but I have them in my pocket-book," persisted Antoinette, taking the Russia leather bound book from her pocket.

John said nothing, but held out his hand. Antoinette showed him the page on which she had sketched her designs, and watched his face anxiously. John uttered not a word, but handed the book to Mr. Dorrien, who, taking out his eye-glass, surveyed his grand-daughter's drawings with a slow, critical gaze.

They were very finely and very skilfully drawn, some in Indian ink and some in water colours. The first that met his eye was the demure face of his grey Angora cat with a pink ribbon tied round her neck, and falling in a graceful bow on her milk-white breast. This little oval portrait of feline loveliness appeared as if framed in an elegant gold locket, and was an excellent likeness. Minette's furry ears, whiskers, and little white nose and forehead, were true to the life, and elicited a murmur of admiration from Mr. Dorrien.

"Very good—very clever, really," he could not help saying.

"And original," put in John.

"Decidedly original. And so is this."

The drawing which Mr. Dorrien commended was on the same small scale as the first. It represented a dragon-fly, with gauze-like wings of blue and silver, and long thin body, hovering over some tall reeds. Mr. Dorrien liked this, but preferred Minette. "And what is this? A parrot! On my word very clever, very clever!"

Polly stood on her perch, her red head turned on one side, parrot fashion. Her black eye seemed to be looking at you curiously, and there was a meaning in her black hooked bill and tenacious black claws. Antoinette had lavished the richest colours in her palette on this tropical bird, her breast was of the brightest green and gold, crimson and azure mingled on her wings and long tail.

"A handsome bird decidedly!" said Mr. Dorrien, smiling. "Ah! Minette again."

Yes, this was Minette again, but in another attitude. Minette lying at languid length on her red velvet cushion, her outstretched paw toying gracefully with a letter.

"Why, you little satirist," remarked Mr. Dorrien, directing his eyeglass on Antoinette's laughing and blushing face, "you do not mean to say that such is the fashion after which Minette serves my papers! Well, I suppose she does. But why have you not given us Carlo?"

Antoinette informed him that he would find

Carlo on the next page; and so he did, and there was Carlo with a coat on; and a J. D. in scarlet upon it, and carrying a letter with a red seal in his mouth. A beehive, one of those pretty little lady-birds which the French call *bête à bon Dieu* and a butterfly completed the collection of Antoinette's drawings.

"On my word I am surprised," said Mr. Dorrien, putting down the book and removing his eyeglass; "why, my dear, where did you learn drawing?"

"I studied it with Isabella Clarke at La Ruya," answered Antoinette.

"And to some purpose really. I am surprised, and I'm sure so are you, John."

"Indeed I am, sir; I had no suspicion that Miss Dorrien drew so well, and could adapt her talent so ingeniously to our special purpose."

"But are these drawings really available?" asked Mr. Dorrien doubtfully.

He looked at John, evidently quite ready to welcome or discard Antoinette's efforts at her cousin's bidding. She felt this, and looked at the young man with anxious eyes.

"Verney never did anything half so original and elegant," very decisively answered John. Antoinette's face brightened. "Only," he paused to give Carlo's image another look. and

Antoinette's face fell,—“only there are not enough of them for our purpose.”

“Oh! but I can do more—plenty!” cried Antoinette, clapping her hands and her dark eyes sparkling. “How many do you want, John?”

“A dozen more by the end of the week,” he answered unhesitatingly. “You see we want all our time for engravers and printers: besides some of these must be coloured by hand——”

“Oh! but I can do them,” interrupted Antoinette, still eager and enthusiastic,—“I mean the dozen; only I had better lose no time, I suppose.”

She looked from one to the other, and Mr. Dorrien again looked at John, as if referring the matter to him.

“Well, if you will try,” said he, “I can set these going. Even though you should not succeed for this particular purpose, the drawings are too pretty not to be useful to us.”

“And is there really nothing to mend or alter in them?” inquired Mr. Dorrien.

“It would be a pity to touch them,” answered John. “May I have them?” he asked, looking at Antoinette.

Her only answer was to take up a paper-knife, cut out the pages on which she had drawn her little sketches, and hand them to him with a happy, blushing face.

Mr. Dorrien, smiling at the pair with the look of a stage father rather bored with his part, supposed they might like to consult together, and having himself other matters to attend to, so left them.

"Oh, John!" cried Antoinette, as soon as the door had fairly closed upon her grandfather, "what shall the next be?"

"Don't ask me; I have no genius that way—and excuse me if I leave you awhile; I must go to the store-rooms."

She remained alone in that grave sanctuary, once devoted to books, study, and calm ease, and now consecrated to dry business letters, to heavy cares and feverish anxiety. She looked at the papers scattered on the table, some of them covered with columns of figures; from these she glanced up to the bronze figure of Polymnia, with her clear Greek face and meditative gaze. Poor John! This was what he had once aspired to, and had given up—the loveliness and delightful variety of poesy; this was what he had got in exchange, and was tied down to—a task both arid and uncongenial, and, as it seemed to Antoinette, full of terrible sameness.

"Well," said John, coming in and breaking in upon her meditations, "what brilliant idea has come to you, Miss Dorrien?"

"Oh, John! I was not thinking of that; I was thinking of you, and what a hard, hard life you lead."

There was a moment's silence. Her eyes were fastened on his face, which became suddenly grave. John rarely spoke of himself; his feelings, his opinions, he guarded with quiet reticence. He seldom complained of life, or its accidents: he never alluded, even remotely, to the past which he had forsaken, he did not deplore the future which lay before him. If Miriam ever rose from her ashes, she was visible to no eyes save his. What he thought now of the poem he had ruthlessly burned, or if he ever thought about it, even his own mother knew not; and though that subject was in Antoinette's thoughts just then, she did not dare to allude to it—for, after all, John had never taken her into his confidence; he had never even attempted to convert her from her scepticism by expounding to her his own religious hopes and belief. He had been reserved, though not unkindly so.

"What makes you think that mine is a hard life?" he asked, after a pause.

"You have so many cares, John."

"Everyone has cares, and I have mine—but I have my reward, too. A firm like this is like a good ship, of which it is dangerous and hon-

ourable to be the Captain. It is a hard life—yes; but your true sailor does not care for the shore—and now what of the drawings?”

He was quite the man of business, and Antoinette could not help perceiving that, though John in the library was kind, he was not like John in Mrs. Reginald's sitting-room. She felt a little abashed, and as if she had taken a freedom; but, rallying, she said,

“Would you like a windmill, John?”

John's eyes lit at the suggestion.

“A windmill! Splendid! How could you think of such a thing!”

Antoinette smiled demurely.

“I have been reading Don Quixote,” she said, “and there is a print of a windmill in the book which I can use—for, you know, John, I could not draw a windmill from memory or imagination.”

“Of course not. Anything else?”

Antoinette, who was rubbing the paper-knife thoughtfully along her smooth cheek, was silent awhile, then remarked gravely:

“John, I should like a lobster; a red, boiled one, you know.”

John could not help laughing, but accepted the lobster, though not holding it equal to the windmill.

“Then I shall go and ask Mrs Reginald to get me a model,” said Antoinette, much pleased

at her success ; "and when I have other ideas, may I come and tell them to you, John ?"

She spoke hesitatingly, as if doubtful of her welcome.

"Surely you know you may," he answered, a little reproachfully.

A bright smile thanked him, and with a nod Antoinette opened the door, and was gone. She ran up at once to Mrs. Reginald's room, and entered it breathlessly.

"Oh ! Mrs. Reginald, I want a lobster," she cried—"I mean at once—pray do send out for one immediately. I have no time to lose."

"So hungry as all that ?" exclaimed Mrs. Reginald, raising her eyebrows.

"Oh ! Mrs. Reginald, how could you think I wanted to eat it ? I hate lobster ! It is for a drawing." And forthwith followed the explanation, which amused and interested Mrs. Reginald greatly. She entered into the spirit of the thing with her usual freshness and vigour. She sent out, not for one lobster, but for three, that Antoinette might be sure of a suitable model. She would make her draw in her sitting-room, because hers, she maintained, was the best light in the house. She brought out a portfolio, in which she kept wood-cuts, prints, and other scraps, in the hope of assisting Antoinette's conceptions ; and, in short, she was so

much charmed with this new hobby, and so wrapped up in it, that she forgot her customary afternoon visit to dear Mrs. John.

Dear Mrs. John, surprised at her solitude, came down to see what had caused it, and found Antoinette looking meditatively at three lobsters in different positions, and Mrs. Reginald looking at Antoinette with her head on one side, a smile on her brown face, and her hands behind her back.

"My dear creature," she cried, enthusiastically, "I have such a piece of news for you! Only think—don't touch one of these lobsters, for goodness sake; they are as sacred as if they were Egyptian divinities—only think, this brown-headed little girl is a genius, and John has found it out, like a clever boy as he is; and don't tell me that Mademoiselle Basnage ever could have made anything out of a lobster."

Antoinette could not help laughing, partly at Mrs. Dorrien's amazed face, partly at Mrs. Reginald's tone of triumph; but she had no time to spare, and left the task of explanation to her zealous adherent.

Mrs. Dorrien was pleased, but she was a little affronted too. She had been vexing herself with John's trouble ever since, and no one had come to tell her that the trouble was over; and so, though she praised Antoinette, and express-

ed herself delighted, she could not help taking the absent Mademoiselle Barnage's part. How could Mrs. Reginald know that Mademoiselle Barnage, who was said to be so clever and accomplished, could have made nothing out of a lobster in such an emergency as this?

"Don't tell me that she could or would," persisted Mrs. Reginald, in her most obstinate tone. "Don't *I* know what girls reared after a pattern turn out?—never an idea of their own. When you see one you see twenty, all dolls—and what can dolls be but dollish?"

Nothing could be clearer than this, and Mrs. Dorrien, having uttered her little protest, submitted, and leaning back in her chair, thence looked at Antoinette's bending and intent face, and supposed that, now that she and John were making such progress in their intimacy, the real courtship would soon begin, and then the wedding would come, and preliminary—most important in Mrs. Dorrien's opinion—the partnership.

CHAPTER IX.

THE three days that followed were very delightful days to Antoinette. For the first time in her life, she tasted the sweetness of toil and usefulness. Up to the present her labours had been desultory and fitful, and whatever pleasure she might find in her tasks had been tempered by the feeling that the world would be none the worse off if she left them unaccomplished. But now, what a difference ! Now John, now Mr. Dorrien, now La Maison Dorrien actually wanted her, and were all the better for the fancy which she possessed, and the culture she had given it. That the form of art to which she now devoted her thoughts sleeping and waking, for she dreamt about her vignettes, was a very little form of art indeed, luckily did not trouble Antoinette. She did her best, and nothing for which the best is done can be really poor or mean. And so she worked on, and her work was useful and prized, and Mrs. Reginald

petted, and John praised, and even Mr. Dorrien admired her, and eleven designs—not of equal merit or originality, John was obliged to admit that, but all available—had been produced by Antoinette, and were being engraved, printed, and coloured, and only the twelfth was wanting, when she came down early one morning, and entered the library, where John had been working long before daylight had filled the grey court.

“Well,” said he, quickly reading the perplexed meaning of her face, “what is it now?”

“I have had a dream,” said Antoinette, sitting down and looking earnestly at him—“a very odd dream, John. May I tell it to you?”

“Certainly.”

“It was about the vignettes—I dream about them every night,” added Antoinette, with so much seriousness that John bit his lip not to laugh. “Well, I dreamt about them last night. I thought I was in my room in La Ruya, not here, sitting by the open window, and listening to the young swallows twittering in their nest above my head under the eaves of the roof, and as I listened I thought oh! what shall I do for a twelfth design! I must have another, you know, and I can’t get one. Then I thought of all sorts of things—a fern—but I have done it—a sprig of seaweed—but we have that too—in

short, I could find nothing new, when the swallow, leaving her nest, flew down, and lighted on the bar of my little wooden balcony and began to sing. It was a very pretty little song, and she looked at me all the time, and clapped her long wings every now and then, and turned up her bright eye, and opened her bill, and all, as if she were a nightingale, till I lost patience, and told her to be quiet. 'Nonsense,' she answered, nodding at me, 'I sing beautifully, to begin with; and then I am the very person you want, for you are thinking of America, and I am going there this moment with a message of good will, and I am to bring back another message from the president of our friends, the birds, over the water, and look,' said she. So she opened her wings and flew away, and all at once it flashed upon me, as I saw her flying with her pretty dark wings outspread, and her silvery breast shining in the morning sun, that she was indeed the very person I wanted, and that I could never get a prettier design to head a letter than a swallow flying."

"Never, never, indeed!" cried John, delighted. "Oh! Antoinette, I am much mistaken if your swallow does not go from one world's end to the other with her message of good will."

But Antoinette, who ought to have looked

charmed at his warm approval, only hung her head, and said despondently,

"I am so sorry, John. I can't draw a swallow. I tried ever so often, as soon as I woke, and I can't draw the pretty bird flying; and a stuffed one would not do for a model."

"But I can get some one to draw it," promptly answered John; "anything, everything can be had for money in this wonderful Paris; and men who can draw swallows flying are as plentiful as cherries."

"Then you could have got plenty of people to do my vignettes," said Antoinette, colouring up.

"No, no," he promptly responded; "I can get plenty of clever hands to execute, but the fanciful minds to conceive, though they are to be had, are not so easily and so quickly found." With this Antoinette had to be satisfied. It would have been more gratifying, to be sure, if she could have drawn her swallow on the wing; but as this was a feat beyond her power of accomplishment, she allowed herself to be comforted by John's smiling reminder that it was not every one who could dream to such good purpose as she did.

This swallow, which sent Mrs. Reginald into ecstasies, was the end of Antoinette's labours for some time.

"Don't draw too much on your fancy, my dear," said the shrewd lady. "Fancy is simply the most capricious and wayward of will-of-the-wisps. It is amenable to no rule, and obeys no law. So don't frighten yours away by making it work too hard, or you will find that in the hour of need it will forsake you utterly. Improve yourself in drawing—that is work; and let Fancy take a nod till you want her."

As John echoed this wise advice, Antoinette had nothing to do but to obey. She did so with all the more docility that she took the deepest interest in the bringing forth of her designs under that form of note-paper and envelopes to match, which was to render them available for the purposes of *La Maison Dorrien*. Nothing indeed could exceed her pleasure when John Dorrien placed in her hand a little packet, containing samples, printed, coloured, glossy, highly pressed, and, to Antoinette's eyes, miracles of art, of her twelve vignettes.

"And now, John, how are you going to settle accounts with that child?" asked Mrs. Reginald, when this little ceremony took place in her sitting-room on the evening that saw the swallow depart for the journey across the Atlantic, "for you will surely not be so shabby as to take her labour for nothing."

"Certainly not," promptly answered John. "I am authorized by Mr. Dorrien himself to place at Miss Dorrien's disposal a cheque for the full amount which would have been due to the faithless Verney."

"You don't mean it," cried Antoinette, colouring up with delight and surprise.

A cheque, which John Dorrien put into her hand, was his only answer. She laughed joyously, looking from John to Mrs. Reginald.

"And have I really earned all that money?" she said; "and can I really do what I like with it?"

"To be sure you can," he answered, smiling at the childish earnestness with which she put the question. But even as he spoke, her face fell. The happy pride vanished from her smile, the gladness left her eyes. Her first thought had been to make a present to Mademoiselle Mélanie of her earnings; but when she remembered how her aunt hated John Dorrien, how Oliver and she were plotting against him, and doing their best to make her, Antoinette, abet them, she hated with all the might of an honest heart to apply thus the money which, after all, she owed, and she knew it, to John's kindness.

"No," said she, looking up into his face with a sudden dimness in her bright eyes—"no, John. If I can have obliged you, I shall be glad; but

there shall be no money between us—none. Money,” she added, in a tone full of sorrow—“I hate it—it is the cause of every misery, of every trouble. I wish there had never been any—never! never!”

And so saying, she let the cheque drop from her hand. It fluttered into the fireplace near which she was standing, a flame caught it, and in a moment it had shrivelled up into a little thin transparent scroll.

John was silent. He had heard the remorseful ring in Antoinette’s tone, and he half guessed its meaning. Mrs. Reginald, however, raised her eyebrows, and lost no time in uttering an indignant protest against Antoinette’s philosophy.

“Was there ever such a little sentimental puss?” she cried. “No money! Why, you ninny, if there were no money, what would there be?—no grand cathedrals, no palaces, no museums, no pictures, no poems, no books, no expeditions to the Arctic Pole, no African missionaries, nothing worth living for. No money!—was there ever anything like it? We might as well be savages at once, and take to beads and shells by way of specie.”

“Of course I am wrong,” said Antoinette, a little abashed, though she still spoke sadly; “but only think, Mrs. Reginald, of all the mischief money does.”

"In the first place, is it money?" asked Mrs. Reginald, shrewdly; "and in the second, don't you know, my dear, that But is the wicked fairy who was not asked to the christening when this social world of ours was born, and who always comes in to spoil everything. This house would be delightful, But the chimneys smoke; that girl would be all a man's heart could wish for, But her family is not to be endured; that man is the best fellow in the world, But he has not a grain of sense; and so on. But where's the use of arguing? You have burned the cheque, and set your heart against money—something else must be found. John, I move that you take us all to the Opera. Ninette has not been there yet, you know."

"Hear! hear!" said John.

"Oh!" cried Antoinette, with sparkling eyes, "that will be delightful! When shall we go? —to-morrow?"

"Why not this evening?" he asked smiling. "It is not too late; and you will soon be ready."

"In five minutes," she said breathlessly; and without waiting for another word, she was out of the room and was up stairs in a moment.

Oh! the light heart of youth, that bounds so quickly in answer to the call of pleasure! The joyous spirits which cannot be depressed, but

must soar upwarda like airy bubbles on the Summer breeze. Antoinette forgot remorse, money, Oliver, Mademoiselle Mélanie, her own past, present, and future—she forgot all save that she was going to hear divine music, and enter a world of enchantment.

The same magic made Antoinette, who was very neat in her person, but who took plenty of time to be so, dress in the unusually small space of a quarter of an hour. Notwithstanding this celerity, she looked “charming,” as Mrs. Reginald declared ; and Mrs. Dorrien, whom her son had induced to join them, ratified the verdict.

“That pale green silk becomes you so well, dear,” she said. “John said you would look well in pale green. He has a very correct eye for colour.”

Antoinette blushed a little, and was glad that John, who was seeing to some business in the library, was not present. Mrs. Dorrien’s well-meant but too significant remarks always marred the pleasure Antoinette took in the society and friendship of her cousin.

“It would be so nice if they would only let us alone,” she now thought with a half sigh.

The grievance was soon forgotten, and there was no trace of it in Antoinette’s mind when she sat in a box with Mrs. Reginald by her side,

and John and Mrs. Dorrien, who preferred a back seat, behind them. The opera was "Lucia," and, what with the music, the thrilling voices, and the pathetic story, Antoinette felt in a dream, till she awoke somewhat abruptly during one of the "*entr'actes*." John had left them, and Mrs. Dorrien and Mrs. Reginald were talking in subdued tones.

"My dear Mrs. Reginald, I wish you would look at her."

"My dear Mrs. John, I have seen her," answered Mrs. Reginald, whose gaze was obstinately riveted on the orchestra.

"She is lovely," persisted Mrs. Dorrien.

"On the dollish pattern," was the reply.

"Now you are prejudiced, and if she turns out to be some one else, you will alter your opinion."

"My dear, I never alter my opinions, for the excellent reason that one's second opinion is generally only the small change of the first. Where's John?"

"Yes, I wish he would come," murmured Mrs. Dorrien; "it would be such a good opportunity to see her without any fuss."

Antoinette looked at the two ladies. Mrs. Reginald, after contemplating the orchestra, was now rapt in the pit, and Mrs. Dorrien's gaze was quietly fastened on a box opposite to

their own. In that box sat a portly, middle-aged man, and a fair, slender girl in white. Antoinette's heart beat. Were these Monsieur Basnage and his daughter? Whoever she might be, she was exceedingly pretty—a smiling, blue-eyed beauty, with a wreath of forget-me-nots in her golden hair. It must be she, for the portly gentleman, turning to some one behind his daughter's chair—a dark shadow, as it seemed to Antoinette—appeared to put a question, and immediately afterwards bowed to Mrs. Reginald, who formally returned the salutation.

“I wish John would come,” said Mrs. Dorrien, fretfully. “Oh, there he is! John, is not that Monsieur Basnage?”

“Yes, little mother—with his daughter, I suppose—a very pretty girl.”

“Dollish, John,” said Mrs. Reginald, compassionating his ignorance; “but I never yet knew a man who was not taken in by dollishness,” she kindly added.

John laughed. No more was said. The curtain rose, and the *Bride of Lammermoor* once more unfolded her sorrows. But that tale, so pathetic, so old, and so new, could no longer rule Antoinette Dorrien's heart and master her attention. Her eyes kept wandering from the stage to the box opposite, from the hapless

Lucia to that pretty, smiling girl, who had no faith to betray, and whose future still lay so fair and so stainless before her. Happy girl! she was evidently the pride of her father's heart; and who could doubt that he had guarded her till that hour from all harm, from every temptation and every ill.

"Will she marry John, I wonder?" thought Antoinette. "Why not?" and she looked somewhat sadly from one to the other.

John had become very grave; his brow was slightly knit, his lips were compressed, and his look was fastened on Monsieur Basnage's box with a fixedness which did not denote a pleased contemplation of its inmates; then he turned away, leaned back in his seat, looked at the stage, and attended to the performance with marked attention.

The Basnages left before the play was over.

"I wonder who is with them," whispered Mrs. Dorrien in her son's ear.

She spoke low, but Antoinette heard the question, also his reply.

"Oliver Black. Did you not see him? He bowed a while ago."

Antoinette turned a scared look towards the Basnages; she saw Monsieur Basnage's broad black coat, the blue forget-me-nots wreathed in his daughter's golden tresses, and, vanishing

almost as soon as seen, the pale, handsome face of Oliver—then the box was black and empty.

This, then, was the dark shadow which she had seen nigh Mademoiselle Basnage. Oliver was come back, and it was thus they met—she sitting by John Dorrien's side, and he standing behind the girl whom John Dorrien might have married, might marry still! It was thus they met, and she thought him far away. Her heart sank. She felt full of trouble, shame, and sorrow. Was this to love? He was again jealous and angry, she was sure; but was the fault hers or his?—were they both to blame, or might they ask untoward circumstances and perverse fortune to bear the brunt of their sin? Wearisome questions, with which all the misery, all the darkness of her life had come back.

“Why, this Lucy has been too much for the child,” kindly said Mrs. Reginald, as the curtain dropped, and they all rose. “She was as gay as a lark when we came out, and now she is as white as if she had seen a ghost.”

Alas! poor Antoinette had seen a ghost indeed; but she wished that Mrs. Reginald were not so clear-sighted, and would let her look alone. John, however, took no notice of the lady's speech, and Mrs. Dorrien was too full of wonder at the presence of Oliver Black in Monsieur Basnage's box to think of anything else.

She had no idea that Mr. Black and Monsieur Basnage were so intimate—Oliver actually at the Opera with Monsieur Basnage and his daughter.

"Oh! Oliver dined with them some time ago," carelessly said John. "Take care, little mother; we had better wait here awhile for the carriage."

"So he knows that!" thought Antoinette, with a throb at her heart. "But how does he know it? Did Oliver tell him?"

She half hoped that his mother would put the question, but she did not, and Antoinette was left to her surmises during the drive home. Nothing then, or later, occurred to enlighten her. She did not see Oliver for several days, though she heard about him every now and then. When they met Mrs. Dorrien was present, and they could not exchange one word. Antoinette feared, and yet expected that he would again write to her, but he did not. The only letter she received was from Mademoiselle Mélanie, upbraiding her with her abandonment, informing her that she was going back to La Ruya, and hinting obscurely that she, Antoinette, would yet rue her ingratitude.

"I suppose I am behaving very badly to them all," despondently thought Antoinette. "I am deceiving John and Mr. Dorrien. I am ungrateful to aunt and Oliver. Why, I should be blind if

I did not see that Oliver is vexed with me."

And with a wearied sigh she put away Made-moiselle Mélanie's letter, and sat down to the task which its arrival had interrupted, a vignette representing a palm-tree.

That, John had said, would be popular in the south, for people writing home to their friends would like a palm-tree at the head of their letters.

"And you know, Antoinette," he had added, kindly, "that your swallow has been, and is still, our greatest hit, and is making quite a little fortune for us. It has been imitated, pirated, and copied, and is to be seen everywhere—on fans, on brooches, on bracelets. In short, it is quite the rage."

Antoinette's eyes had danced with delight as she heard him. Success is so sweet to all of us, and fame has a cup and a draught for everyone, whatever the great people may think, and however they may fancy that it is to be all their own. And now the joy of her task was gone, her pride was humbled, and her little cup was spilled. The old sad, weary life had begun anew.

By the end of November Mr. Dorrien, who had looked pale and unwell of late, discovered, after a conversation with Dr. Parker, that a Winter in the south would set him up again.

Mr. Dorrien's absence or presence was a matter of indifference to Antoinette. She could feel no affection for one who treated her with polite coldness. It also seemed to her, since Mr. Dorrien took so little part in the business, leaving it all to John, that he ought not to be missed, and she was surprised to read an expression of vexation and annoyance on the young man's face when he mentioned Mr. Dorrien's departure to his mother. Mrs. Dorrien looked at him wistfully.

"Does it make much difference to you, dear?" she asked.

"Yes, little mother, it does," he answered; "it puts off some things for six months."

"He means the paper-mill," thought Antoinette, furtively trying to read his clouded face; and then she fell into a dream, and wondered if Oliver had advised that journey to gain time, and, with time, his ends. But had he any ends still?—any, at least, so far as she was concerned? He was very pleasant when they met, and looked kindly at her—more kindly than ever; but he did not, as formerly, make opportunities to exchange a few words with her. He never wrote, never even alluded to the Morphens; he let their secret understanding sleep. It was what Antoinette had wished, and asked for, but his compliance mortified her.

The day of Mr. Dorrien's departure was a memorable one in Antoinette's life. It rose with a promise of snow in its grey sky, which the afternoon fulfilled. She sat in Mrs. Reginald's room, drawing, and she paused in her task (Antoinette's last hit was a ship in full sail) to look at the white flakes as they fell—pale, silent, and swift as death, thought she.

"Mrs. Reginald," she suddenly said, "are you afraid to die?"

"I really don't know," honestly replied Mrs. Reginald; "I have not tried it, you see. And you, dear—are you afraid?"

"Sometimes it seems very dreadful," answered Antoinette, "and other times it seems as if I should not mind it much."

"And perhaps you would not," was the earnest answer; "the young are braver than the old in that, and I am not sure that it is not a good thing to die young. Shall I tell you why? My dear, it is always best to go off on a journey in the morning, before the heat of noon and the weariness of evening."

"Ah! but that is such a terrible journey, Mrs. Reginald," said Antoinette, with a little shudder.

Here was an admirable opportunity to put in a bit of preaching, but, for some reason or other, Mrs. Reginald had of late left Antoinette

in peace. Instead of speaking now a word of warning, or comfort, or hope, she looked up at the ceiling, and tightened her lips like one firmly resolved not to open them. Antoinette looked at her almost wistfully, but, seeing her persistent silence, she resumed her task. After a while she said,

"Mr. Dorrien looked very unwell when he went away—did he not, Mrs. Reginald?"

"Yes, dear; but he has looked unwell for the last fifteen years."

"If—if anything was to happen to him," hesitatingly said Antoinette, "would it be a bad thing—I mean, a very bad thing—for John?"

"I cannot see why it should," coolly answered Mrs. Reginald; "the firm is to be John's to all intents and purposes."

She gave Antoinette a sharp look, but Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter breathed a relieved sigh, and said, earnestly,

"I am glad to hear it, Mrs. Reginald,—oh, so glad!"

"Why, you silly little chick!" said the lady, good-humouredly, "don't you know that, at all events, the matter would rest between you two?—for between you and him there is no one; you are the last of the Dorriens—for the time being," she prudently added.

"We are the last of the Dorriens—he and I," thought Antoinette. "Oh, John! my true, my faithful friend, there would never be contention between us, but—but what shall I do if Mr. Dorrien dies, and Oliver and aunt get hold of me!"

A great sickening fear came over the girl's heart. She could not bear it; she could not go on with her task. She pushed her paper away. She rose, went up to the window, and there stood, looking at the snow. The garden was already white with it. With an impatient sigh Antoinette turned from the dreary prospect, came back to the table, gave her drawing a dissatisfied look, and said,

"Mrs. Reginald, do you think John has come back from seeing Mr. Dorrien off?"

"My dear, he never went," answered Mrs. Reginald, a little drily: "Mr. Dorrien said he had better stay and attend to some pressing matters, so it was little Mr. Black who saw Mr. Dorrien off,"

Antoinette looked a little startled. Did that mean anything?—did Mrs. Reginald mean anything?—for to construe every incident that occurred, every word that was spoken, according to her secret fears, was her lot now. But Mrs. Reginald's brown face, on which the light from the fire played, told her no other tale than

the plain one which her words conveyed : Mr. Black, and not John Dorrien, had gone with her grandfather to the station.

"Then, since John is at home," resumed Antoinette, taking up her drawing, "I shall go down and show him this ; I do not half like it."

"Do, dear. John has a very correct eye."

Antoinette left the room, and slowly went downstairs with her drawing in her hand. The gas was not yet lit, and only the pale reflection of the snow from the court filled the hall below her. In that light she caught a glimpse of John entering the library.

"Oh ! John," she said, but the door had already closed upon him. She hurried down, and followed him in. The room was lit, and she found him bending over his desk, searching amongst the papers upon it "Oh ! pray," she said eagerly, "give my drawing a look before you do anything else."

He turned round slowly, with his hand still among the papers, and he showed her the face, not of John, but of Oliver Black. Why he was there, and what he was doing near the desk of his friend, she knew, and by the smile on his face she saw that he was aware of her knowledge. They stood so one moment—she filled with fear, horror, and shame ; he cool, with an unchanging marble face and audacious bearing.

"John is not here," he said; "you will find him in the store-room, if you want him."

She did not answer. She seemed rooted to the spot on which her feet rested. He had asked her to do this thing, and she had refused to obey him with indignation; but yet the abyss which there is between a deed suggested and a deed done had divided his proposal from his action. She had not, she could not, feel of the one the horror she felt of the other.

"Dearest," said Oliver, perceiving that she did not move, "ought you to stay here? John might come back, and it would be awkward."

She did not stir.

"Oliver," she said, in a low tone, "do not do it."

"Do not do what?" he asked, smiling coolly.

"Do not do it," she repeated, and her face was ashy white, and tears of anguish flowed down her cheeks.

"But do not do what?" he insisted. "If you mean that I ought not to stay here—why, it was John who sent me."

"He sent you!" she said, almost with a cry, "and you can do it?"

"My dear child," he remonstrated, with his look of candour, "what can you mean, and what did *you* want with John? Ah! to show him your drawing," said he, taking it from her

hand. "Why, you little witch," he added, laughing, "is that ship for me? Did some bird whisper in your ear that I am going off again? By-the-by, we must make the most of the present time. John is safe in the store-room for ten minutes, if not more. Dearest, I am going to New York, not to-night or to-morrow, of course, but some days hence. The news are not official yet. It is Mr. Dorrien who sends me, and John does not know a word of it, so don't let it out. Everything is going on swimmingly; whilst Mr. Dorrien is away, I cannot do much, but the moment he comes back you may rely upon it that I shall bring matters to a crisis."

He did not see, or seeing it, he ignored Antoinette's dismayed face as he uttered these words, and he did not feel, or feeling it, he again ignored the shrinking with which, as he drew her towards him, and said fondly, "Good-bye, darling," she avoided the embrace, and in a moment, as if afraid of discovery, had escaped out of the room.

She flew upstairs like one pursued. She entered her room, filled with grey twilight, and, bolting the door behind her, she stood breathless on the middle of the floor. She raised her arms, she clasped her hands above her head, and she said aloud, in the bitterness of her an-

guish, "Oh! I love him no more—no more! I love him no more!"

Antoinette was dull and pale when she came down to dinner that evening. She was also very silent, but when Mrs. Reginald asked what ailed her, she opened her dark eyes wide, and said, almost eagerly,

"Oh, I am very well, Mrs. Reginald—very well, I assure you."

"I see that you brought me this," said John, handing her the little drawing of the ship. "I found it on the floor of the library with another paper. I suspect Mr. Dorrien's cat must have come in whilst I was out."

"And so you leave your papers about, you negligent boy!" said Mrs. Reginald, tartly. "How do you know who might pry into them?"

"No, Mrs. Reginald, I do not," answered John, smiling—"none, at least, that I care for. My papers are always under lock and key, save those, which the whole world may look at."

Antoinette, who had held her breath whilst he spoke, allowed a sigh of relief to escape her as she heard this. Oliver's attempted treason had availed him nothing.

"But I love him no more—no more!" she repeated to her own heart in dreary wonder.

CHAPTER X.

THE Winter had gone by, Spring had returned, and with Spring Mr. Dorrien, as pale and languid as ever, and with a touch of impatience bordering upon fretfulness, to temper the cool politeness of his manners.

He had been home about a week, when Antoinette entered Mrs. Reginald's sitting-room half-an-hour before dinner-time, to put a question to that lady.

"Mrs. Reginald," she asked uneasily, "is there anyone coming to dine with Mr. Dorrien this evening? I hear voices below."

"And you are surprised. Of course you are. Who ever heard of leading the life we lead here? We might as well be in China, my dear. No one comes near us, and we go near no one. I don't call that civilization," emphatically added Mrs. Reginald.

"And who is our guest this evening?" eagerly asked Antoinette.

"Only little Mr. Black, dear."

The girl's colour faded, and she stared before her.

"I did not know he had come back from America," she said in a low tone.

"Oh! yes, he came back two or three days ago. I remember now you were not in the room when John said so. Well, my dear, the pleasure you must feel at his return was only deferred. You are not going to change your dress for Mr. Black?" added Mrs. Reginald, raising her voice as she saw Antoinette turning to the door.

"Oh! no," said Antoinette, "I shall stay as I am, but I must go up to my room for a few minutes."

Up to her room she went, shivering all the way, and when she was there she sat down, and looking at the Spring sun, which shone on the cold waxed floor, she brooded dreamily on what lay before her.

It is very hard to cease to love, to sit by the spent fire and see the white and dead ashes of that which was once so living and so bright. The extinguished hearth is the fit type of all desolation.

Antoinette felt sorrow inexpressible at the change in herself. She had been battling against it ever since her arrival in Paris, but it had prevailed over her, and now she conquered. She had ceased to love.

Oliver Black had committed a fatal mistake with this young girl. She had plenty of faults, which he might easily have turned to his own ends. She was rash, imprudent, wilful, and self-reliant. She could be obstinate in good or in evil, and she could feel strong aversions, even as she could feel strong loves. But she had one quality on which he had not reckoned. Some people are naturally amiable, others are high-minded, and others again are very patient, and they are so almost without effort, because they cannot help it. Antoinette's attribute was that she was true. It was not in her power to be otherwise. She had never practised the ways of deceit, and though she had been taught no regard for truth, she could not swerve from it with impunity. She ever committed some blunder through which trouble came, or success whenever she succeeded only gave her shame and distress. She had struggled against the feeling which seemed a treason to love. She had invented excuses for Oliver, but it had been in vain. His plausible cynicism could not convince her against the irresistible arguments of her conscience, which told her daily how base it is to lie. She despised herself for the life of falsehood which she led; and, just retribution, she also despised him who made her lead it.

Oliver was too keen not to see the change in

her, but his nature was too low to fathom its motive. "She thinks John the better match of the two, and she throws me by for him," thought Mr. Black angrily. "Well, let her! the game is not played out. They will laugh who win. In the meanwhile, I will not let her free till my purpose is served."

He was so far right that the contrast between John Dorrien and himself had quickened his young mistress's sense of his unworthiness. Antoinette had begun by almost hating her cousin. He was very kind to her, she could not deny it, and she was grateful for it too, after a fashion; but it irritated her to see the worship he received from his mother and Mrs. Reginald, and her pride was stung at the frank and open position he could assume, whilst she must needs stoop daily to mean arts. Most willingly if she could would she have thrown the burden of Oliver's sin, and of her own, upon him, and sent him, a scapegoat, into the desert; but she could not. The same honesty which made her hate the wrong in herself forbade her to hate the right in John. She did her best not to compare him with Oliver, but that too was not in her power. Oliver himself, by entering into competition with her cousin, had rendered comparison inevitable. Day after day Antoinette was obliged to look at these two men and to

judge them. She tried to turn from the contemplation, for it filled her with bitterness and sorrow; but something or other ever forced it on her, till her heart grew faint and weary with the pain. Alas! that love which is born so quickly, which a look, a word may kindle into sudden and burning life, should expire so slowly, and through such bitter throes!

But, though Antoinette's love was sickening of a most grievous disease, it was living still when she entered the library on the evening of the day of Mr. Dorrien's departure. It was living, and while there is life there is hope; but when she saw Oliver's treacherous hand in the papers of his friend, her love died in one moment. It died of a death for which there is no resurrection—it died killed by shame, contempt, and a sort of horror which left nothing behind, not one soft or tender memory, nothing but the stinging recollection of a great error.

And now Oliver was come back, and they must meet again. She delayed going down till she dare delay no longer. Her heart nearly failed her as she stood in the hall; for Oliver was behind that closed door, and what if he were there alone! At length she took heart, and opened it. At once she saw Oliver; but oh! relief inexpressible, Mrs. John Dorrien was with him. Her pale cheeks resumed their

glow, and in her gladness she almost smiled.

Oliver sat on the sofa, and the moment the door opened he saw her. Antoinette wore a dress of pale yellow lawn, of simple yet becoming make; a crimson knot fastened her white collar, and another knot of the same bright hue nestled in her dark hair. Oliver Black had a keen, artistic feeling for the picturesque, and as she paused for a moment on the threshold, and he saw her, fresh, bright, and young, he smiled, remembering a gay landscape which he had seen once or twice—a landscape of yellow waving corn, with two bright poppies dancing in the sun. What else there was in it he had forgotten, but the yellow corn and the two red poppies had remained in his mind, and suddenly came back to him now.

“A nice little thing, if she would only be amenable,” he thought, casting a critical look on Antoinette.

But that she would not be so he knew even before she closed the door. She might smile; but cold revolt was in her look, in her bearing, in the very turn of her slender neck. He felt it in her passive hand when they exchanged the calm greeting of acquaintances who meet again after a long but unimportant separation.

“Only think, dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Dorrien, smiling and looking delighted, “your pretty

swallow is all the rage in America. Mr. Black saw nothing else."

"I am sorry for America," coolly answered Antoinette; "I thought there was so much to be seen there."

Mrs. Dorrien looked baffled, and Oliver changed the subject, and entertained John's mother after his own pleasant fashion; but all the time he looked at Antoinette from where he leaned back amongst the sofa cushions, with his handsome head framed by the red velvet drapery of the window behind him. Antoinette did not see that look, and Mrs. Dorrien did not understand its meaning. It was a peculiar look, calm, ironical, and withal dispassionate—the look of an amateur who studies a pretty picture at a sale from a point of view which he feels to be final, who admits its merits, but also sees its blemishes and general unsuitableness, and decides not to bid for it. After all, be it remembered that he had never really loved her; he had sought her not by any means for her own sake, but because he wished to make a stepping-stone of her. If he had found her to be plain or repelling, he would certainly have let her go by as a chance not worth his purchase; but being as she was, pleasing and attractive, he had been glad to win her as well as the position which such gain he thought must

needs bring ; but now that she was a clog, and not a help, all that he had once liked in her seemed to fade away. She was useless—worse than useless ; she was dangerous, and a feeling very much akin to hate—for Oliver Black was not, and never could be, a real hater—rose within him as he now looked at her. He felt, and had felt even before he went away, that Antoinette had been turning from him and his teaching, and looking up more and more to John Dorrien.

A better man than he was would have resented this, and resented it all the more that he deserved it. "*Il n'y a que la vérité qui fâche,*" says the old French proverb. To be read through, weighed, and found light, is hard to bear ; but Oliver was a philosopher, and he had let her have her way. Why should he not ? If he wished to slip his neck from that tie, so ill-advised, so dangerous even—must he not let her slip out of it too ?

It was not pleasant ; the least jealous of men would dislike such a contingency ; but there are many unpleasant things in life, and Mr. Black, who had gone through some, was prepared to go through plenty more, if needs be. So her altered manner did not surprise him much now, nor grieve him much either, especially remembering as he did their parting—but it did disturb him a little ;

for, after all, he was mortal, and had his weaknesses, and though he at first entertained Mrs. Dorrien in his pleasantest strain, and repeated all the old hackneyed jokes about the Yankees, he flagged after a while, and John's mother began to think her task of keeping company in Mrs. Reginald's stead very wearisome. She felt quite tired, and was even provoked with Antoinette, who, instead of helping her, sat there cold and silent, as if Mr. Black were the greatest stranger, instead of being John's friend. In her vexation she said and did what she would not have said or done otherwise. The conversation had fallen upon that inexhaustible topic, the weather.

The Spring was unusually warm and early, and a horse-chestnut tree in Mr. Dorrien's garden had well-nigh vied with the famous tree in the Tuileries garden. It had expanded one broad leaf three days after that historical character.

"Only think, Mr. Black, three days! My dear," turning to Antoinette, "there is daylight enough yet to show Mr. Black our horse-chestnut. Take him out and let him see it, will you?"

Antoinette's colour faded, but she met Oliver's mocking look, and she started to her feet in a moment.

"With great pleasure," she said, not without a sort of defiance.

"I cannot go, you know," apologetically remarked Mrs. Dorrien to Oliver; "the sun is out still, but the air is keen, and I must not venture out at this hour."

Oliver politely begged that she would not mention it, and followed Antoinette out of the room.

"What a relief!" murmured Mrs. Dorrien, sinking back in her end of the sofa. "I don't know what possessed Antoinette to be so disagreeable to the poor young man. Now she must be civil to him, at least."

The sun had not yet set when the pair, after crossing the hall, and opening the glass door, stepped down into the garden; but its ruddy light had retreated to the high walls and glittering windows of the neighbouring houses; below all was cool, grey, and dim.

"You little witch!" said Oliver, turning his laughing face on Antoinette, almost as soon as the door closed upon them; "by what spell did you make the Dragon—John's own Dragon, too—give us this chance?"

Antoinette walked on without answering.

"Only think, dearest," whispered Oliver, walking by her side—"your aunt is in Paris. This time she has taken up her abode in Mr.

Brown's own house. I met her on the stairs this morning, as I looked in at him about these eternal Morghens. She says she must see you."

Antoinette stood still.

"Mr. Dorrien will not allow it," she said.

"Oh! perhaps he has changed his mind."

"Mr. Dorrien will not allow it. The first thing he did on his return was to question me about her, and to inform me that whilst I stayed in his house I must have no intercourse with my aunt. He has heard about her misfortunes at Monaco, and it seems she has been there again, and he is quite inexorable."

Oliver raised his eyebrows, but was silent.

"Will you tell her so?" she asked, after a pause.

"Oh! certainly. I cannot say with pleasure, for I need not tell you that Mademoiselle Mélanie will be exasperated. Are you quite sure that Mr. Dorrien is obdurate?"

"Quite sure."

"Make John try. He can do a good deal with the governor."

Antoinette looked up with a flash of pride. She knew that Oliver only said this to ascertain whether she had asked John or not, and she scorned to deny.

"John has failed," she answered, briefly.

"And cannot you do without Mr. Dorrien's

consent?" asked Oliver, with a curious smile.

She shook her head in impatient denial.

"This, then, is your final resolve."

"It is. I will never risk again what I risked once; with what result you know."

There was a pause, during which they exchanged looks. Each felt that more was coming; that the great crisis was at hand, and it was even more to vex her, than to delay the evil day, that Oliver said,

"Let us forget Mademoiselle Mélanie, and talk of ourselves. What have you to tell me, dearest?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing, and we have not met for so long? You might ask how I have fared, how I am getting on with Mr. Dorrien, and what chance there is of that opening we both long for so much."

It is hard to deceive a woman who has ceased to love. Antoinette turned upon him with a sort of scorn.

"What opening?" she asked.

"My darling, you know what I mean. Some opening that will allow me to say to Mr. Dorrien, 'Sir, I love your grand-daughter, and she loves me, but we are both too poor to enter upon housekeeping without your help. If you will sink all your capital in that confounded mill,—

no, I should not use that strong adjective, of course,—or if John will not marry Mademoiselle Basnage, whose money would be so useful——”

“And will he not marry her?” interrupted Antoinette.

“Well, I believe he will, in the end,” candidly answered Oliver; “because, you see, he must. The firm wants her money too much, and then John has not seen her to speak of, and when he does see her he will find compliance easy, for she is truly charming.”

Antoinette was silent awhile, then she said,

“I hope she is worthy of him. John deserves to be happy.”

“Of course he does,” answered Oliver; “but surely so do we. Is that the horse-chestnut-tree?” he added, critically examining a tree before him, on which a few frail green leaves shivered in the chill April air. “A poor concern, I must say.”

“Oliver!”

In a moment he knew what was coming, and turned slowly round to look at her.

“It is all over, and you know it,” said Antoinette, whose face was white. “You need not speak to Mr. Dorrien. You are free, and so am I.”

“I suppose you have been thinking this over,” remarked Oliver, coolly, though his dark eyes burned like fire.

"I have. You never liked me, Oliver, and I—I like you no more."

"You are candid, Miss Dorrien," he said, with cool sarcasm. "Have you anything else to say?"

Very quietly she answered,

"Nothing."

"What if I refuse to let you free? What if I insist that you keep your solemn promise to me."

She looked at him, and said, weariedly,

"Why do you try to cheat me, Oliver? It is all over, and you know it, and do not wish it to be otherwise; and you have no desire to speak to Mr. Dorrien, for you never liked me, and I—I like you no more."

She used the same words she had already used with sad iteration. She was very sorrowful, not for him, but for the love that was dead within her. Heartless though he was, Oliver felt a little pang of regret at losing her. She had liked him, and he knew it, and, for the sake of that liking, he was almost sorry to let her go.

"But I cannot lose you so—I cannot, indeed," said he, drawing near her, and half smiling. "You must tell me what I have done, who has been poisoning your mind against me? You must, in common justice."

He spoke in his tone of candour. A shudder ran through Antoinette's whole frame, and he saw it. She remembered the lies, she remembered the baseness and the treason. She clasped her hands in amazement and indignation. And, as if to bid him remember how and when her love had died, her look rested for a moment on the windows of the library. But she said no more; she walked on without looking back. And Oliver did remember, and his eye followed her receding figure with no friendly look; but he also smiled at her folly in throwing down the glove so openly. "Poor little thing!" thought Mr. Black.

"And where is Miss Dorrien?" asked Mrs. Dorrien, surprised, as Oliver entered the drawing-room alone.

"Miss Dorrien's head aches," he answered, lowering his voice in polite concern. "I have seen the tree—very remarkable."

"How vexatious!" said Mrs. Dorrien, a little crossly, for she thought that all the trouble of entertaining the visitor would fall upon her again. But she was saved this infliction. John came in, then Mrs. Reginald, who was civil and dignified, then Mr. Dorrien; and it was time for the dinner, during which Oliver made himself very pleasant, but at which Antoinette did not appear.

"Her head aches," said Mrs. Dorrien, on Oliver's authority.

"Poor child!" exclaimed Mrs. Reginald, in a tone of concern.

John was silent, but looked grave.

"Very distressing these headaches are," murmured Mr. Dorrien. "And so you say, Mr. Black, that the Yankee shrewdness has been overrated."

Oliver was sure of it, and he gave plenty of instances in point, which proved at least that he had found something to take note of in America besides Antoinette's swallow.

CHAPTER XI

"MRS. John!"
"Yes, dear."

"Mind what I tell you." Mrs. Dorrien on being thus addressed by Mrs. Reginald, who had come as usual to give her "a look" in her room, put down her work and looked earnestly in the face of her friend. Mrs. Reginald, having thus secured her attention, raised her forefinger, to keep it fast, and emphatically observed, "There is something going on."

Trouble bordering on dismay appeared in the wistful face of John's mother. She had become unfitted for anxiety of any kind, and could no longer, as once, battle with life.

"Something going on," she faltered. "Oh! Mrs. Reginald, what can it be?"

"That," calmly answered Mrs. Reginald, "I don't know."

"Not at all?"

"Not in the least."

Mrs. Dorrien's face fell.

"Perhaps there is nothing going on, dear," she remarked, trying to rally and look cheerful.

"Yes, there is," positively said her friend.

"You must have noticed how things look before a storm—air heavy, sky dark, man and beast alike uneasy, the very insects twice as troublesome as usual—in short, everything telling us—the storm is coming. Well, my dear, so it has been in this house for the last week, and I am amazed, I am, that you have not noticed it."

Mrs. Dorrien, who had taken up her work, put it down again.

"What have *you* noticed it, dear?" she asked.

"How do you like John's looks?" said Mrs. Reginald, by way of reply.

"Dear John is always grave," said John's mother, hesitatingly; "he has so much on his mind."

"Well, then, I daresay he has a good deal on his mind just now," drily remarked Mrs. Reginald, "for he is as grave as a judge, and as silent as a stick."

Mrs. Dorrien looked perplexed.

"And Miss Dorrien?—what do you think of Miss Dorrien?" inquired Mrs. Reginald, nodding. "Does she look happy with that white face of hers?"

"She is out of health just now, dear."

"Out of health!—she is simply miserable. But why so?—ah! why?"

"I hope—I trust nothing is amiss between her and John," ejaculated Mrs. Dorrien, plaintively.

"Who ever knows what ails these silly young things?" contemptuously said Mrs. Reginald. "They are either all right or all wrong, without rhyme or reason; but something does ail her, that is sure."

"But Mr. Dorrien looks so well and cheerful!" cried Mrs. Dorrien, as if she had just made the discovery. "I never saw him in better spirits."

"That is the greatest sign of all," exclaimed Mrs. Reginald, triumphantly. "When a man looks so wholly unlike his former self as our Mr. Dorrien looks just now, something must be going on. As to Mr. Brown," she added, more soberly, "he is simply beyond any comprehension of mine. He never comes near me, and when we meet, he skulks away, like a dog who has stolen a bone, and who deserves a whipping."

"Well, but what can be going on?" argued Mrs. Dorrien.

"My dear, I don't know, and don't even try to know," coolly answered Mrs. Reginald. "Life

is full of mysteries, which neither you nor I can fathom. Who knows, for instance, where the dogs go? Is it love?—is it pleasure?—is it business? How steadily they do trot along the streets, through cars, legs, horses, rain, or mud! They have a purpose, only what is it? I long wanted to find it out, but was obliged to give it up, and since then I have taken the lesson to heart, and don't worry myself because I can't understand what is going on before my eyes; only, dear, you must not scold if I say that it is since little Mr. Black came back from America that something has been going on."

Mrs. Dorrien uttered an exclamation. What could Mr. Black have to do with what was going on? Mrs. Reginald looked upwards, and did not know, but was sure that something had been going on since that little Mr. Black had come back. She did not wish to be uncharitable, but of that she was quite sure.

Mrs. Dorrien, whose fears were roused, tried to elicit something more definite out of her friend, but Mrs. Reginald either would or could not say more than she had said. Her conscience pricked her for her significant allusion to Mr. Black. Though she indulged in her unreasoning dislike of him, she knew well enough that it was wrong, and she was all the more pertinaciously silent because she felt really uneasy.

The change in Mr. Dorrien was that which impressed her most. It did not seem to her so much the change of recruited health as that of languid spirits stimulated by some secret motive into fictitious life.

"Look at him now," thought she to herself, as, after leaving her friend (in no cheerful frame of mind), she went down the stairs, and through the broad landing window saw him alighting at the *perron*—"is that *our* Mr. Dorrien, so languid, so leisurely in all his movements? Why, that man is as jaunty and holds his head as high as if he were twenty-five. And I declare there is little Mr. Black coming up to him, and grinning up in his face. I daresay Mr. Dorrien is asking him to dinner, and that we shall have him again to-day. Pah! I must not look—it makes me sin, it does."

It certainly did Mrs. Reginald's moral being no good to see the excellent understanding which prevailed between Mr. Dorrien and John's friend. It would have irritated her still more could she have felt certain that her surmise was a correct one, and that Mr. Dorrien had been uttering one of those friendly invitations to dinner which, by bringing her face to face with her discarded lover, had become the torment of Antoinette's life. But Oliver, with many thanks, had modestly excused himself. He had an en-

gement. He was afraid he could not come. He had given the papers to Mr. Brown, who would explain, and so forth. But Mr. Brown's explanations were not pleasing to Mr. Dorrien. Mr. Brown had not the gay looks, the agreeable voice, and the epigrammatic manner of Oliver Black. Moreover, Mr. Brown had not fathomed this matter, and there might be mistakes; so Mr. Dorrien again pressed Mr. Black to stay; and Mr. Black, after a show of resistance, yielded, and agreed to go in and take the papers from Mr. Brown, and bring them in to Mr. Dorrien in his own room.

He found that gentleman leaning back on his dark but luxurious couch, abstractedly stroking his grey Angora cat, and looking somewhat excited.

"Well, Mr. Black," he exclaimed, scarcely giving his visitor time to sit down, "what does the architect say?"

"Well, sir," answered Oliver, without a moment's hesitation, "I find the matter even more serious than I anticipated—but I had better explain."

"Another time—after dinner," interrupted Mr. Dorrien. "Will you kindly give me the result of your information now?"

"Well, then, you must have been deceived in the estimates—I mean," he added, correcting

himself at once, "that John must have committed some mistake; the outlay will be enormous. It will require all the capital of the firm, or nearly so; and should war or revolution supervene, La Maison Dorrien will be at the mercy of events—such, at least, is the conclusion one must come to, after consulting the estimates of Monsieur Landre. You will find the figures here."

"Of course, of course," impatiently said Mr. Dorrien, glancing over the papers which Oliver handed to him; "I always said so. It is folly! Mr. John Dorrien must be infatuated about that mill; he always was. We cannot run that fearful risk; I always said so."

"John is imaginative," hesitatingly said Oliver, "and imagination is a great deluder. He was a poet, you know."

"A poet!" interrupted Mr. Dorrien, with a little start of surprise; "I never knew anything about it. A poet! Are you sure, Mr. Black?"

Yes, Mr. Black was quite sure; but, after all, what John had been mattered little; the question was, what he was now; and the only unfortunate result of his boyish propensity for verse was that unlucky gift of imagination, which, when carried into business, was so dangerous a faculty.

"Of course, of course," murmured Mr. Dor-

rien. "I need not tell you, Mr. Black, that I have no illiberal prejudice against poets—of course not; but they are not men of business. And though Mr. John Dorrien has great talents, and has been most useful, it is no use denying that, when he advocates a paper-mill, his imagination carries him too far. I am sure Monsieur Basnage must have got wind of it, and he is most useful—most useful. And then I have other views. I want a change—a total change; the doctors say Paris air is fatal to me. I have a mind to buy some house, or little château, or something of the kind, on a railway line, not far from the sea, and of course I want money for that."

"Of course," answered Oliver in a low tone, whilst his dark eyes burned with sudden fire. "The château which belonged to Mr. Blackmore" (he never called him "my father"), "and in which I was born, is still for sale," said he.

"Indeed! And do you consider it a desirable purchase, Mr. Black?"

"Decidedly so. The house has no great pretensions,—a French château, you know,—but it is commodious, and well furnished. The grounds are delightful; there is plenty of fishing in the little river that runs through them; the railway station is within a short drive, and

the sea beats against the cliffs that shelter it from the easterly winds. To crown all, the heir-at-law, Mr. Blackmore, is tired of having the place, which he does not use, on his hands, and he will give it up for far less than its real value, only"—Oliver paused, and smiled—"only he requires ready money."

Mr. Dorrien made no comment.

"Have you seen the place lately?" he asked.

"Are you sure it is still for sale?"

"Quite sure, unless it was sold two days ago. It was advertised in yesterday's *Galvani*."

He took the number out of his pocket, and showed it to Mr. Dorrien, who there saw enunciated all the advantages belonging to La Maison Rouge, concluding with a significant hint of moderate terms, which made the man of business smile.

"Strange if he should buy it," thought Oliver, watching Mr. Dorrien's pale face and gold eyeglass above the edge of the newspaper: "strange if I should thus step back into what should have been mine but for my poor dad's dilatoriness! Who knows but I may, and that La Maison Rouge may not prove the surest of antidotes to John Dorrien's paper-mill?"

"La Chapelle is the name of the place, is it?" said Mr. Dorrien. "Can you leave me this, Mr. Black?" he added, putting the newspaper down.

"By all means. But I have been thinking again about the mill! there may be exaggerations. Shall I consult another architect, and——"

Mr. Dorrien interrupted him by impatiently inquiring what the use of that would be.

"No," he added, in the tone of a man who has made up his mind, "I must have some conversation with Mr. John Dorrien, that is all. I am greatly obliged to you, Mr. Black, for the trouble you have taken in all this. I wish the matter had not gone so far, especially in what concerns Monsieur Basnage, who has been growing decidedly cool of late. Mr. John Dorrien is to blame in this too. I am sorry for it. I liked the connexion, but of course I cannot seem to care about it if Monsieur Basnage does not."

Mr. Dorrien spoke in a vexed tone, and looked restlessly at Oliver, who, laughing gaily, said,

"I am nobody, and perhaps can mend matters—at least, I shall not commit either you, sir, or La Maison Dorrien, if I attempt what you or John certainly could not do without making Monsieur Basnage conceited. I can feel the ground, and advance or draw back, according to Monsieur Basnage's mood."

"Well, yes," said Mr. Dorrien, brightening at

the suggestion, which, indeed, he had both expected and wished for; "you can do that, Mr. Black. I shall be obliged to you. And will you also kindly see Mr. Brown before dinner, and make that matter clear to him?" added Mr. Dorrien, who was already tired of business, and who dreaded entering upon the subject of the paper-mill with his precise subordinate.

Oliver smiled good-humouredly, and was ready to do anything to please Mr. Dorrien. He took up his papers, and with the same smiling face went at once to Mr. Brown's room.

"Well, Mr. Brown," said he, airily, as he entered that gentleman's presence, "I really think that I have accomplished two things. That matter of the Morghens is settled for good. The little hitch we had is over, and so far as they are concerned, you need have no more trouble on your mind."

Mr. Brown pushed up his spectacles, and smiled beamingly on the young man. Mr. Black was too good, too good, and he, Mr. Brown, had been thinking of frames for the Morghens—black and gold. Did he, Mr. Black, think they would suit? "For engravings, you know, for engravings, black and gold," pursued Mr. Brown, slightly excited.

"The poor old devil is actually going to pinch himself for these hideous black and gold

things," he good-naturedly thought, so he, in the same fit of good-nature, suggested that Mr. Brown need not trouble about frames at all. But Mr. Brown thereupon looked so blank that Oliver perceived he wished to spend on his beloved Morghens, and, praising the black and gold frames as chaste and suitable, he glided into other matters.

"You will be glad to learn, Mr. Brown," he calmly remarked, "that the paper-mill is, as you foretold, really impracticable, and must be given up. I have all the figures here."

"Excuse me, Mr. Black," cautiously remarked Mr. Brown, "I did not foretell—I only expressed a doubt."

"Which proves your sagacity by becoming a fact," persisted Oliver, determined on committing him to his side of the question.

But Mr. Brown could not be committed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Black," said he, "but if Mr. John Dorrien's figures do not prove the truth of his views, other figures cannot prove their falsehood."

"Well, well," good-humouredly replied Oliver, "I have done what Mr. Dorrien wished me to do—set a clever architect to work, and here is the result. It may be right, or it may be wrong—you will find that out, Mr. Brown."

Mr. Brown softened, as usual, to that pleasant

face and good-tempered way of Oliver's. There never was any resisting that agreeable young man, who always yielded to you so gracefully. Now Mr. John Dorrien was an excellent young gentleman, to be sure, but he was apt to be arbitrary, and if he took up a notion, and thought it a right one, neither heaven nor earth, viz., Mr. Brown, could move him, or make him give it up; and so, unconsciously, no doubt, but still none the less surely, did Mr. Brown like to find that infallible, dogmatic John in the wrong, and, with that bias on his mind, set himself to study the papers after Oliver was gone.

Mr. Black repaired to the drawing-room. "Curious if I should find her there!" he thought.

Yes, Antoinette was there, but she was not alone. John and his mother were with her, and the three were looking at the sketch of a new design for note-paper which Antoinette was showing them. They stood in the window. The light from the west fell on their faces—Mrs. Dorrien's so faded and so wan, Antoinette's with a flush of pleasure upon it just now, and John's so frank and manly. They all seemed pleased, and Antoinette was laughing, and John was looking at Antoinette with a smile in his grey eyes.

"May I look too?" asked Oliver, coming forward, and approaching Antoinette, who started and turned pale as she heard his voice.

It was John who held the design, and he handed it to him, saying,

"Look, and admire, if you please."

Antoinette's last production was quaint and pleasing. A pretty girlish head, with a hat and feathers, white collar and blue bow, and—a pair of wings peeping out behind.

"We were asking Miss Dorrien if she too has wings, and means to fly away from us," said John.

"A pretty fancy," remarked Oliver, ignoring this speech, and evidently referring to the drawing; "but a head and wings and no body—will not that have an unfinished look, Miss Dorrien?"

"And how would you have me finish it, Mr. Black?" she asked calmly.

"Oh! there are so many ways of ending these fair sylph-like creatures," he replied, smiling. "A wasp would do for this one, I fancy. She looks as if she could not merely fly away, but sting too."

That he meant to sting, Antoinette knew, as she heard him. As to that, so did John Dorrien know it, and his dark eyebrows contracted slightly. Oliver Black had yielded to temper, and he was sorry for it as soon as the words

were spoken ; but seeing Antoinette near, John had proved too much for his equanimity. He had just that sort of jealousy which requires no love for its existence—the jealousy of wounded vanity ; but, as we said, he was sorry, and did his best to mend the blunder. The dinner-bell gave him the best opportunity in the world of doing so. Oliver Black at once devoted himself to Mrs. John Dorrien, and was so sunny, so amiable, and so charming, that the lady could not but be graciously pleased ; and even John was softened, and sent his suspicion to sleep. Only Antoinette remained sad and grave, and during all dinner-time, and for the whole of the evening, averted her looks from her discarded lover.

“ Oh ! it is to be war, is it ? ” thought Oliver, amused. “ Poor little thing, you little know what lies in store for you ! ”

Mr. Dorrien, whose good spirits contrasted with those of his granddaughter, could not keep them up ; however, he retired early, and Oliver, who had felt dreadfully bored at heart, left at the same time with the master of the house. With a sigh of relief he crossed the threshold of the old gate, and found himself in the quiet street, with the stars shining above him, and a calm fair moon floating in vapoury clouds far away above the city roofs. The night was

balmy enough for Summer, and Oliver thought how soft and silvery it must be in the shady grounds of his dead father's old abode. Yes, he would like to get that French château back again. He was born there, the child of shame and unlawful love, he had been politely, but none the less positively, told to leave it by the distant cousin who had claimed and legally held what should have been his inheritance. It had witnessed all that was cruel and bitter in his life. He would like to make it the witness of his triumph too. It would be pleasant to his smarting pride if he could cross that threshold with the tread of a master, and defy those old rooms to deny him any more their shelter—nay, what should prevent him from resuming, by going through proper legal forms, of course, his name of Blackmore?

"Well, Mr. Black," said a sharp voice at his elbow, which, though it addressed him in English, was decidedly foreign in accent, "have you seen the young lady yet?"

"My dear Mademoiselle Mélanie," blandly replied Oliver, "you may believe me, not till this very evening could I have that little conversation with her, carried on in subdued tones, whilst John Dorrien, confound him! was looking on, by which I could ascertain her final resolve. I grieve to say that, with many expres-

sions of regret, she declines seeing you—indeed, professes herself unable to do so, whilst under Mr. Dorrien's care. Very unpleasant to all parties; but, poor little thing, what can she do?"

"You take her part!—you are in league with her!" cried Mademoiselle Mélanie, ready to turn all her wrath upon him.

"I!" and Oliver shrugged his shoulders significantly—"why, she would very much like to get rid of me if she could."

"The little ungrateful serpent!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Mélanie, thinking not of his, but of her own wrongs.

"My dear Mademoiselle Mélanie," he remarked, in his bland way, "what is the use of disguising the truth? The young lady wants us no more. You are not her real aunt, and she prefers her real grandfather to you. I am a poor devil, and she prefers John Dorrien to me. We must bear it, my dear mademoiselle—we must bear it."

He spoke quite good-humouredly, but his bantering tone exasperated her all the more, and the light from the gas lamp near which they stood, showed him her pale face turning white with rage. At first she said nothing. Then suddenly turning upon him, "What will you give me if I help you to be revenged upon her?" she asked.

"Revenged!" he answered, coolly. "My dear Mademoiselle Mélanie, I have not the faintest wish for revenge. I am a practical man, you see, and I think revenge a very foolish, useless feeling—an expensive one, too, sometimes."

He laughed in her face, in evident enjoyment of his superiority.

"Do not go on with those grand, calm ways at me!" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "I know you want to get rid of her—I know you do; I know she is in your way. What will you give me if I help you to put her out of it for ever?"

Her penetration startled him a little.

"Thank you," he said, carelessly; "but what can make you think that I want to—actually to get rid of—I am ashamed to use the words—of Miss Dorrien?"

"Because she no longer cares about you, and that you know it," she answered, audaciously.

He said not a word. He looked at the cigar he was holding delicately in his left forefinger and thumb, that its fragrance might not annoy the lady in whose presence he stood, then suddenly raising his eyes, he fastened their gaze full on her face. They exchanged a long look, such a look as they had exchanged once when they sealed Antoinette's fate; and this look

sealed it again, though for the present not a word was spoken.

"All this is exciting you, Mademoiselle," said he. "I shall give your anger time to cool, and perhaps to-morrow—yes, to-morrow morning I shall call upon you—with your permission, of course."

"Yes, come and see me, now that you want me," she answered, sharply—"come, Mr. Black."

He laughed with perfect good-humour, raised his hat with graceful courtesy, and so left her.

Cool! He knew well enough that reflection would not cool, but rouse her wrath to fury, so that, like the waves of an angry sea, it would rise higher and higher, until not a stray gleam of reason would be left to pierce its gloom. What he wanted was to give Mademoiselle Mélanie time to fashion her revenge into some practicable form or other, which he might use in moderation; for her cruel, savage nature was wholly foreign to his. He could be pitiless enough in his way, but he was not needlessly so, and, provided that he could get rid of Antoinette, what more did he want?

CHAPTER XII.

ANTOINETTE had borne up till then, but **A** this evening she broke down. To meet Oliver so frequently, and on such terms of close intercourse, was more than she could bear. Mrs. Reginald, passing by her door after Oliver was gone, heard her low sobs and moans, and after listening awhile with a face of much gravity, she retraced her steps and went straight to the library, to which John had repaired as soon as the party broke up. Mrs. Reginald never entered the library, for when John went there it was to work; but for once she broke through the rule, and if John was surprised at her unexpected appearance, no less was she surprised to find that John was not working, but sitting back in his chair, at some distance from his desk, and evidently lost in thought.

"Don't be alarmed," said she, as he started at her appearance; "your mother is all right. I only want to know if you can tell me what

ails that child. You have been getting on pretty well with her this Winter; perhaps you know why she is sobbing in her room as if her heart would break."

John looked disturbed.

"I know of only one cause of trouble to her," he said, after a pause. "Mr. Dorrien will not allow her to see her aunt."

"Before I believe that anyone can ever sob and moan for that person—" indignantly began Mrs. Reginald; then breaking off, "Say something else, John."

But John had nothing else to say.

"You don't think," said Mrs. Reginald, knitting her eyebrows—"you can't think that she can be fretting about that little Mr. Black?"

A painful flush covered John's pale, intellectual face.

"If you mean that she cares about him," he replied, "I feel almost sure that she does not."

"Then, John, take the advice of a friend," said Mrs. Reginald, very earnestly. "No shilly-shallying, no time-losing, John. She is a good child, though she has been so badly reared, and the man whom she likes can turn and lead her the right way. Besides, it is time," added Mrs. Reginald, impressively, "that you did see about the partnership. Mr. Dorrien's health is uncertain," she continued, as she rose, "and that

alone ought to make you take care of yourself."

"I believe you are right, Mrs. Reginald, thank you kindly," said John, abstractedly; but, to say the truth, he was thinking of Antoinette's sobs and tears, and not of Mrs. Reginald's well-meant advice.

"John, if you will not think of yourself, think of your mother," persisted Mrs. Reginald, raising a warning forefinger at him.

"You may be sure that I will," he replied, very earnestly; but when she was gone he relapsed into his communing with his own thoughts, and they bore no rose-coloured hue just then.

"A good boy, but an obstinate one," thought Mrs. Reginald, as she went upstairs. "I wonder how *she* is getting on now?"

She paused again at Antoinette's door, but no sounds of grief now came from her room. The passionate outbreak was exhausted, not, however, without leaving traces of its passage behind.

Antoinette looked very pale and ill the next day, and with every day that passed she looked worse. John spoke to Mr. Dorrien, who looked rather wearied at having to think about Miss Dorrien's health, but who said,

"Let Dr. Parker be called in, by all means."

Dr. Parker came, spoke of debility, ordered quinine, and hinted, but cautiously, about the morale being affected. Mr. Dorrien heard him coldly, but had no doubt, since Dr. Parker said so, that Miss Dorrien wanted to be strengthened.

Quinine not having restored either Antoinette's colour or her spirits, John took an early opportunity of speaking again to Mr. Dorrien, on that gentleman's return from a short excursion to the north-west of France.

"Miss Dorrien is no better, sir," said he.

Mr. Dorrien was sorry to hear it.

"Dr. Parker came for my mother whilst you were away, and saw Miss Dorrien again. He found her weaker than before, and suggested that a change would do her good."

"And how can Miss Dorrien have a change?" coldly asked Mr. Dorrien.

It had become a fixed idea with him of late that *he* wanted a change, and he thought it a piece of presumption in a young thing like Antoinette to put herself on the same footing with him. Undeterred by his cold looks, John persisted.

"My mother could take her down to the sea-side," said he. "Mr. Black went to Saint Ives some time ago, and he said something on his return which reminded me of a cottage to be

let near it. It belonged to a worthy old man who has been dead some years, and his house is now let furnished to sea-side visitors. It would be cheap enough at this time of the year, and it is a quiet, pleasant place."

"And Mrs. John would stay with Miss Dorrien?" said Mr. Dorrien, who had heard him with a half-smile. "I suppose you would take them down?"

"I could go down with them, stay a day, and come back the next."

"Just so, Well, I see no objection to your plan, John. You can say so to Miss Dorrien."

It was close upon the dinner-hour, and John, guessing that he should find Antoinette in the drawing-room, went there at once.

She was sitting by the window, pale and listless, when the door opened. She gave a look round, saw John, and turned back again to her apathetic contemplation of the garden. There was no welcome in her bearing; but, heedless of this, John Dorrien went up to her, and taking a chair, sat down by her side.

"How do you feel to-day?" he asked.

"Oh! very well," she answered, resignedly.

"Thank you," she added, after a pause.

"Would you like a drive with my mother?" he suggested.

"I think I should prefer staying within, please," she answered, languidly.

"Or shopping with Mrs. Reginald?" he persisted.

"But I hate shopping!" said Antoinette, almost crossly.

"Or there is a new great singer, shall we go and hear her to-night?"

A faint light shone in Antoinette's dark eyes, but died away almost at once. If she went to the theatre, might she not see Oliver there? The mere thought sickened her.

"Thank you, John," she said, relapsing into her languor, "but I do not care about the play just now."

"What do you care for?"

"Nothing."

She folded her hands upon her lap, and uttered the dreary word with sorrowful apathy. John Dorrien looked at her attentively awhile, then said quietly,

"I hope you follow the doctor's prescriptions?"

"Yes," she impatiently answered; "but what is the use? I tell you, John, that I am not ill."

She sighed wearily, for she was not ill indeed, and she knew it. Her ailment was that of an unconquerable sorrow. She had committed a great, a fatal mistake, and she could

not forgive herself for having done so. Her love for Oliver Black, once her delight and her pride, was now the humiliation of her daily life. She could forgive herself for having taken a bad man to be a good one, but the sin for which there was no remission, and of which she felt the daily sting, was that of having abetted his treason. She had not gone as far as he wished her to go, but she had allowed him to make her daily life a lie. Cruel, intolerable thought! And it was a lie of which the consequences were full of mischief, not to herself merely—that she could have endured—but to others. She had been to Oliver Black that tempting opportunity which even the wicked need for sin. If she had scorned the concealment, without which he was powerless, Oliver would have slipped out of their engagement, and never attempted to take John Dorrien's place. That had been his object from the first—Antoinette knew it now—that was his object still; and, unless by a treason for which John himself would scorn her, she could avert nothing. John suspected, but he did not know, and she could not put the proof he needed in his hands. She could not say "Take care; the friend you brought here is a traitor. He robbed you of the bride that had been promised you, and now he will rob you of Mademoiselle Bas-

nage, and your position here, if he can." Not one word of all this could she utter. Silence was her hard, hard lot, and that silence and the remorse on which it fed was the illness of Antoinette—the ailment for which no doctor could find a cure.

"Antoinette," said John, after awhile, "would you like to leave Paris?"

"How so?" she asked, with a look of doubt, but also of sudden animation.

"The doctor suggested that change of scene might do you good, and Mr. Dorrien is willing that you should try the experiment. There is a pleasant little village on the Norman coast near Saint Ives. I could take you down there with my mother, leave you both for a fortnight or so, and then go and fetch you."

A flush of joy rose to Antoinette's pale cheek. To leave the city in which Oliver dwelt, the house where, do what she would, she could not avoid seeing him; to be far away by the sea-side, on breezy downs, in green fields, far from the hateful past and bitter present—all this, even though it was only for a fortnight, seemed a heavenly relief from misery.

"Oh, John!" she cried, her eyes filling with grateful tears, "how good you are! I shall like it so much—so much!" she could not help repeating, in the fervour of her gratitude.

Mrs. Dorrien was pleased at the prospect of a change, and expressed herself willing to take charge of Antoinette ; her only regret, she said, was to leave Mrs. Reginald behind.

"Never mind me, dear," cheerfully replied her friend, as she helped her to pack up on the morning of the departure—for the journey thus quickly decided upon suffered no delay—"never mind me, I say. Enjoy yourself, and don't keep John longer than you can help."

"But the dear boy will want a change too," answered John's mother, in an injured tone.

"Yes, yes ; but don't keep him, and don't let him lose time philandering with Antoinette—that's all."

"Oh, there's nothing of that kind," said Mrs. Dorrien, with a sigh. "He and Antoinette seem very friendly, but yet——"

"Well?" said Mrs. Reginald, looking up from the trunk, and seeming interested.

"Yet they don't get on, and I wish they would, if it were only for the sake of the partnership," added Mrs. Dorrien with a fresh sigh.

"Perhaps they get on better than you think," shrewdly suggested Mrs. Reginald. "Young things are awfully deceitful."

"But I asked John, dear, and he was obliged to confess there was nothing yet between them—not a word."

"Bless you, dear! they sometimes never get on better than without talking. They are so 'cute."

"Yes, but it would be so much more comfortable if it were all settled. I wonder Mr. Dorrien does not bring matters to an issue."

"Not in a hurry," drily said Mrs. Reginald. "Never was."

"And yet so kind as he has been, dear; so willing that Antoinette should go and John accompany her! I thought he would have made difficulties, whereas he did not raise one objection."

Mrs. Reginald looked up at the ceiling, and tightened her lips, as if firmly resolved not to contradict, nor yet to assent. Still the temptation to utter a protest could not be resisted, and she said significantly,

"Very true, dear, but for all that don't keep John, and don't let him stay either. Don't look uneasy, dear. Only business is business, you know."

This incontrovertible proposition closed the discourse; but though the uneasiness which Mrs. Reginald's remarks had vaguely roused passed away from Mrs. Dorrien's mind, it remained under a very definite shape in the mind of Mrs. Reginald herself. We know how that lady had discovered some time before this "that

something was going on." What that something was she began to suspect on the very morning of the journey.

Before going out Mr. Dorrien had informed her that he would not dine at home this evening.

"I understood that Mr. Brown was to stay to-day, Monday," remarked Mrs. Reginald. "I believe it was on Friday you told him that 'you wanted him to talk over something.'"

"Oh! very likely," composedly answered Mr. Dorrien; "but we are both going to dine at Monsieur Basnage's, and to talk over that very matter. Thank you for reminding me, Mrs. Reginald. I am sorry you should be left alone, but I did not anticipate that our friends would forsake us so soon."

And with his most courteous smile, Mr. Dorrien bade her a good morning.

"Both going to dine at Monsieur Basnage's!" mentally ejaculated Mrs. Reginald. "I thought there was a coolness in that quarter."

"Well, Mr. Brown," she could not help saying, as she met that gentleman in the hall a few minutes later, "everyone is forsaking me, it seems. I have a nice evening before me alone in this great house."

"I am sorry I cannot keep you company, Mrs. Reginald," answered Mr. Brown, cautious-

ly, "but I have an appointment—an appointment, Mrs. Reginald."

"Oh! you have, have you? With Mr. Black about the Morghens?" suggested Mrs. Reginald, with cutting sarcasm, for she had got to include Mr. Brown's engravings in her dislike of Mr. Black.

A gleam of dry humour shot into Mr. Brown's dull eye.

"Well," he said, yielding in a weak moment to the temptation of a joke, "you know, Mrs. Reginald, that when Mr. Black and I meet, we must talk of the Morghens."

Mrs. Reginald stood petrified. Mr. Brown, as she had often told him to his face, had not as much imagination as would invent a lie the size of a pin's head. If he said or implied that he was to meet Oliver this evening, the inference was clear—Oliver too dined at Monsieur Basnage's. Just as John Dorrien might have dined, if he had not been going to Normandy. And he, the stranger, the interloper, was actually going to meet Mademoiselle Basnage in John's stead! Monsieur Basnage's daughter might be a doll, as Mrs. Reginald had so often asserted; but she was at least a doll belonging to, or destined for, or proposed to John Dorrien, and that little Mr. Black should sit at the same table with her was not to be endured.

"Mr. Brown," severely said the angry lady, "you are acting a part unworthy of you, and mark my words"—here her forefinger was raised—"you will repent it."

"Mrs. Reginald!"

"You are helping out that little Mr. Black, and all because he got round you with those Morphens of yours, which are no more Morphens than I am, Mr. Brown."

"Mrs. Reginald, they are authentic," exclaimed Mr. Brown, much offended.

"You are helping him out against that admirable, true, upright John Dorrien, whom you have known from his boyhood; and mark my words, you will repent it."

So saying, Mrs. Reginald left Mr. Brown, who was too much displeased at the slight cast on his Morphens to inquire into the meaning of her warning.

But of this significant incident no one save Mrs. Reginald herself was aware; and an hour later, John, his mother, and Antoinette were leaving the Hôtel Dorrien, and driving to the Saint Lazare station. For many days Antoinette had not felt so light-hearted and happy as when she stepped into the carriage that was waiting for them at the foot of the *perron*. She could have sung in the gladness of her heart; and when they passed under the arched gateway, and got

out into the gloomy street, she thrust her head out of the carriage window and nodded a triumphant adieu to the old house; but quickly the light died from her eyes, the smile from her lips, and the gladness from her heart, as in the street below, standing close to the wall, to let the carriage pass, she saw Oliver Black. He threw away his cigar as he saw her, and raised his hat to her with grave and ironical courtesy, and Antoinette shrank in with a sad, dismayed look, the triumph of her departure all gone.

"You seem quite faint, dear," said Mrs. Dorrien, in a tone of concern.

"Oh! no; I am so well, thank you," answered Antoinette, trying to rally, and look bright, and failing signally in the attempt.

But distance is a great enchanter, and, though her feeling on seeing Oliver had been: "What is the use of going away, since I must come back to where he is?"—Antoinette could not help putting her trouble by, as she leaned back in a railway carriage, and looked at the green landscape on either hand. Oh! surely, surely in a world so fair, where the sky was so serene, and earth was so lovely, where a beautiful river flowed in the shade of silvery willow-trees, and picturesque old towns rose on the slopes with their cathedral towers glittering in the sun, in a world where there were so many happy homes,

pleasant villas with lawns and gardens, quaint châteaux with high roofs, weathercocks, and formal-clipped trees,—in such a world as this there was room for Antoinette and her little bit of happiness?

The sun was setting, a ridge of fire, behind the low green cornfields, when John said—

“We get down here.”

“Is this La Chapelle?” asked Antoinette, looking round her, and seeing only a little station in a lonely-looking spot.

“This is Saint Ives,” answered John.

Antoinette saw Mrs. Dorrien look at her son, and she saw John’s grave face and earnest eyes. That name of Saint Ives had called up many a vision from the past which she could not even guess at. She had heard, indeed, of the Abbé V éran’s famous school, but Mrs. Dorrien’s obscure and penurious widowhood, John’s restricted childhood, his ambitious youth, and its passionate hopes, had only been partly revealed to Antoinette.

“My dear boy,” said Mrs. Dorrien, looking wistfully up in her son’s face, and pressing his arm.

John did not answer. He was not thinking of the dream he had relinquished, he was not looking back and pining for the days that might have been—but, as he gazed on a vacant spot

before him, he seemed to see a man with a dark face and iron-grey hair, he seemed to hear a hearty voice, with the warm Irish accent, calling out,

“Good-bye to you, John, my boy! Good-bye!” Saddest of sad words—sad even if they who speak it meet again; for does not every parting take a link out of the chain which binds our lives here below?

A railway omnibus conveyed the travellers along a quiet, lonely road, to a pleasant-looking little village, clustering round an old grey church—and this was La Chapelle. It was twilight when the car rolled into an inn-yard, and they all alighted.

“I smell the sea,” said Antoinette, with sparkling eyes. “Oh! John, may I go and see it presently?”

“Yes, surely,” he answered, pleased to see how much better she was looking already.

Mrs. Dorrien, however, was both cross and tired. She liked Antoinette, but John had been far more attentive to that young lady than she fancied. She wished him to marry Mr. Dorrien’s granddaughter—of course she did; but was that a reason why he should be so rapt up in her? In short, that jealousy which seems a part of maternal love, was wakening in Mrs. Dorrien’s breast, and exercising some ravages there.

"Lean on my arm, little mother," said John; and the kind, familiar tone, and the kind grey eyes, soothed the poor lady at once; but on recovering her good humour she became doleful.

"I wish we had dear Mrs. Reginald here!" she said with a sigh. "I shall be dull without her, I know. Dear Mrs. Reginald! I don't suppose there is another like her."

They were going up a steep path, with tall trees on either side, a shady path, with here and there a hawthorn hedge, or a bramble bush, with high ferns, and a wealth of wild Spring flowers—a path loveliest when the sun is out, and when patches of blue sky look down at you through the green boughs, but also beautiful, mysterious, and cool in the greyiness of the fading day. Antoinette, who had just seen a nest of primroses, uttered a cry of delight.

"Oh! Mrs. John," she said, "look at them! they only grow up in the mountains with us, and look at them here."

"I am talking and thinking of Mrs. Reginald, and not of primroses," replied Mrs. John, aggrieved; and then, as Antoinette looked penitent and sorry, she suddenly softened.

"Do not mind me, dear," she said kindly; "but no one ever has had such a friend, I sup-

pose; and I think it so hard that she should have been left behind."

"Do you think she would have liked coming, little mother?" asked John.

To which Mrs. Dorrien replied, with some asperity, that it would have been no use for Mrs. Reginald to like coming, since she had never been asked; and that, of all cruel things, the most cruel was that Mrs. Reginald should never have a holiday.

"This is the house," said John.

Antoinette looked eagerly at their new home. She saw a thatched building, long and low, surrounded by an orchard of fruit-trees in blossom. Tall beeches hemmed it in, and only a wooden palisade divided it from the path. As John lifted the latch of the low gate, a door opened, and a bright young woman came out to meet them.

"I am so glad you are come," she said, volubly. "I dreamed last night that Nicholas was driving the car into the sea, and it made me quite unhappy all day."

"Did you think he had driven us into the sea?" asked John, gravely.

The young woman raised her eyebrows in amazement at the absurdity of the question. Why, Nicholas was the best driver for leagues and leagues, she said, and as to driving into

the sea, he must first go into the village.

"Then what meaning did you attach to your dream?" asked John, as he led his mother into the house.

"Why, none, of course," replied the young woman, impatiently. "But dreams are dreams, though Parisians will laugh at them."

They had entered a pleasant dining-room, where the cloth was laid, and everything spoke of dinner and welcome. Mrs. Dorrien's face cleared.

"How nice!" she murmured, with a sigh.

No less pleasant did she find her bed-room. Antoinette was simply charmed with hers.

"Oh! John, only think," she said, when they met again in the dining-room, "I can touch the blossoms of one of those beautiful trees when I open my window."

The dinner was plain, and soon over. As soon as the meal ended Mrs. Dorrien said, with a wearied sigh,

"I think I shall go to bed, John. You may take your cousin to the sea. I mean that you need not mind leaving me," she added, with a resigned sigh.

"Oh! John, will you really?" cried Antoinette, jumping up quickly.

"Ay, that I will, and at once, too," was the ready answer; "but wrap yourself well, for this

sea is not the Mediterranean, Miss Dorrien."

She ran to her room in joyous haste. She came out again flushed and eager; for, oh! if they should be late—if they should not be able to gaze at the sea before the morrow!

"Dreadful calamity," said John, laughing; "and yet it will keep, Antoinette! This way," he said, as they passed out through the gate, and struck at once by a field of young corn.

The air was keen, but pure. Not a cloud dimmed the evening sky, but a soft grey mist already floated over the landscape. How beautiful, how fresh, how cool and green, did this northern land look to the eyes of the southern girl. As they went through the silent fields, and caught a glimpse of a thatched cottage here and there, with its twinkling light, and thread of smoke rising slowly in the silent air, for this was supper-time, Antoinette broke into fresh raptures, which it did John good to hear. But the sea, where was the sea? she asked, ever and anon. Bidding her be patient, he led her down a steep path, dark and uneven, and then all suddenly they came out at the back of the village, and the lonely beach and the wide, calm sea were before them.

No one in France goes to the seaside in Spring, and, so far as visitors went, La Chapelle was deserted. The natives do not care for the

sea, and only a few boys were playing on the shingle. The Casino, a square stone building, was shut up, and the bathing-machines were not yet brought out. Only an old coast-guard was prowling about, with a listless, lounging gait.

"And that is the ocean!" exclaimed Antoinette.

"The ocean! No, only the Channel; but I see you are not impressed. Come down here."

A few boards thrown over the shingle made descent easy till the sands were reached. The tide was out, but it had left many a pool behind, and white bare rocks, like giant bones, and brown rocks, all covered with green and slippery seaweed, stretched their desolate waste to the low horizon. The sun was set, but a deep crimson line showed where the track of his fiery car had been. Above spread a dark blue arch, melting into a pale zenith, sprinkled here and there with a white star. The grey cliffs rose on either hand, looking faint and ghostly in the mist which came floating towards them from the sea. This lay as quiet in its distant bed as if it were lulled in the tideless cradle of the Mediterranean, and its waves were to beat for ever, day after day, on an unchanging shore.

The glorious colouring, the lovely landscape,

the mountains, laden with verdure, and bending their green heads to the sea; the graceful palm-trees and fragrant myrtles of Antoinette's old home, were not here, but, in their stead, a low, moaning waste of waters, making their murmur in a long edge of white foam to the barren and austere shores of a northern land.

"Oh, John! it is very wild and very grand," said Antoinette. "Can we sit down?"

They rested on the edge of shingle, and the fresh salt breath of the sea came to them in slow but steady increase as the returning tide advanced. Antoinette watched its progress, so slow, so sure, with almost breathless interest, and not till it beat almost at their feet could she bear to rise or go away. She was silent as they went home, and when they reached the house she paused on the threshold to say,

"How long are we to stay here, John?"

"A fortnight—three weeks—a month, if you like. I mean you and my mother—for of course I shall go, as agreed, after to-morrow."

"Fifteen days—twenty-one—thirty, perhaps," thought Antoinette. "Oh! I shall be too happy!—too happy! it cannot be true."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BLACKBIRD was singing very sweetly far away when Antoinette woke the next morning. She had not closed her shutters, and an apple-bough, laden with blossom, was bending towards her window, as if to bid her good morning. She quickly opened it, reckless of the cool sea breeze, and gazed with delighted eyes on the blooming orchard. It lay before her in freshness, dew, and sunlight, a picture so pleasant and so fair that it almost took her breath away to see it. Antoinette dressed as quickly as she could, and very softly—for it was early yet—she stole out of the silent house. As she passed through the tall grasses, leaving a waving track behind her, a startled brown rabbit, who had been used to take his breakfast there undisturbed, scudded away in great haste, and vanished in a moment. A world of daisies, buttercups, and orchids lay at her feet; the tender boughs of the blossoming trees met above her head, and here and there streaks of

the morning sunshine stole in, shedding their pale gold on the green earth. Early as was the hour, the bees were out at work already. Their low hum guided Antoinette to a retired nook, where she saw their yellow hive, and standing still, she watched them at a distance.

"I wonder at what o'clock they get up!" said John's voice behind her.

"Earlier than you, sir," she answered saucily, and turning her beaming face upon him.

She looked as well, or almost as well, as ever. It seemed as if, by merely leaving Paris, and the chance of meeting Oliver Black, behind, she had also left ill-health and low spirits. With the wonderful elasticity of the young, she had got back in a few hours her blooming cheek and buoyant spirits. The change was so great that John could not but be struck with it; but because he was so struck, he said nothing about it.

"Yes, bees are early risers," he answered, smiling, "and hard workers, too; but we are here for a holiday, and having nothing to do with earning our breakfast, or getting it ready, let us look about us before we go in to it. Come this way, and I will show you something worth seeing and remembering."

He took her to the other end of the orchard. A rustic bench stood in the shade. There was a great gap in the trees that enclosed the place,

and through that gap they saw the valley below them. They sat down on the bench and looked at the picture, framed in an arch of dark green: a little pastoral picture, without one grand or striking feature in it, but cool, shady, and pleasing to the eye. Little thatched cottages, brown, and many of them like birds' nests, and, like them, half buried in bushes and young trees, were scattered here and there on the slopes. One, whitewashed, and shining in the sun, stood on the very edge of a narrow brook that ran along the valley, and was half hidden by tall trees. The morning mists were rolling away from the low hills, the dappled clouds were melting from the sky, a crowing of cocks and cackling of hens rose from every farmyard, and the pleasant voices and merry laughter of children mingled with all these sounds of awakening life.

"How charming!" cried Antoinette. "Oh! if there were but a painter here!"

"When I was here some years ago," remarked John, quietly, "a painter was painting the very view before us."

"Then you have been here before, John?" said Antoinette, surprised.

"Oh! yes," he answered—"very often."

He said no more. He never willingly touched with her on that part of his life in which there

had been an Oliver Blackmore. So Monsieur Latour, and his intended but never-begun picture of Calypso on the sea-shore, and that day which John could not but remember, as he sat by Antoinette, remained buried in the past—that silent past which we all carry about with us, and tell to the ear of God alone. Antoinette did not suspect that all she now gazed on was darkened by the shadow which it was to her a relief so entire to escape. Oliver had told her very little about himself, and had never dwelt willingly upon his early friendship and intimacy with John. It did not occur to her to connect him with this place. She enjoyed that morning hour, and laughed and talked freely with John, and ran out with him in the fields outside the house, to catch a glimpse of the blue horizon; and came in again to meet Mrs. John Dorrien at breakfast, and give her breathless and enthusiastic accounts of the morning. It was all very delightful—oh! so delightful! There was only one sad drawback—John was going away to-morrow.

“Yes,” sighed Mrs. Dorrien, “that is a pity. Poor John was always a victim to business.”

But poor John only laughed, and would not be pitied, and asked what he should do if he had not business to engross him.

“Ah! it is all very well,” sighed Mrs. Dor-

rien again, "but I have not forgotten that you were first at Saint Ives, and that there was nothing you could not have achieved, and now it is only note-paper and envelopes and money that take up your mind."

"You cannot help regretting it sometimes!" exclaimed Antoinette, looking at him.

"I never look back," said John. "I hold that to do so is the merest folly of which a man can be guilty."

He spoke cheerfully, and spoke as he felt, and his brave spirit did Antoinette good.

"Why should I look back?" she asked of herself; "why should I not look forward, and do my best to mend the past?"

But she did not ask herself how that fatal past was to be mended, nor what that forward was to be. With the happy shortsightedness and confidence of youth, she felt sure that all would be right again, and she could not see the breakers ahead.

John had some letters to write, but when these were despatched, he was free once more, and went out with Antoinette. They wandered together in the pleasant green country, through fields, along roads, by lanes; and when they turned homewards the path they took brought them within view of the château which had once belonged to Mr. Blackmore. John wanted

to pass on, but Antoinette detained him. "Oh! do let us look," she said.

The old red house rose before them in the warm sunlight; the tall trees behind it waved their airy heads to the western wind, and house, trees, and green surrounding landscape were set in the pale Norman sky.

"What a quaint old place!" said Antoinette, looking at it curiously. "But who lives there, John?"

"Death," he thought; but he only answered, "No one, I believe—it is for sale." And he pointed to the yellow bill stuck on the stone framework of the iron gate.

"'A vendre à l'amiable,'" read Antoinette. "I rather like the look of it, John; and I have a great mind to buy it," she added, raising her eyebrows with a look of consequence.

He laughed, and wanted to pass on, but Antoinette, peeping in through the bars of the iron gate, detained him.

"I do not like buying a house without seeing it first," she said. "May I go in, John, the gate is not fastened?"

"Let us go in if you wish it," he answered, willing as ever to please her.

He pushed the gate open, and they entered. The grass-grown carriage drive led them to the house, of which the door stood ajar.

"May I just look in?" asked Antoinette, turning round.

He smiled and nodded. She pushed that door open too, and stood in the hall for a moment.

"I suppose I had better not go upstairs," she laughingly whispered; "but I may see that room, John, may I not?"

It was the dining-room—a low, broad room, with the cool green light of the opposite trees upon the dark walls, and here and there the gleam of a gold-framed picture upon them. That room had undergone no change since Mr. Blackmore's death; and the chair which the old man had last sat in stood in its usual place, as if still waiting for its master. Antoinette, unconscious that she beheld what had been Oliver Black's home so long, looked around her with the careless curiosity of a stranger. In his history of his wrongs, Oliver had not mentioned where lay the dwelling of which he had been despoiled. Such particulars were not needful, and might be awkward. Miss Dorrien had wandered from John's side, and was examining a gloomy bronze clock on the mantelshelf, when she suddenly gave a start, and looked round at John with a half-frightened face. Steps were coming down the stairs, and a man's voice was saying in French:

"I assure you, Monsieur, that your presence, far from inconveniencing us, will be a real pleasure to my wife and myself; and allow me to assure you also that at this time of the year the Hôtel de Paris is simply impossible."

"You are too kind," replied a languid voice, which both John and Antoinette knew well, "and I really think I shall accept your hospitable invitation. I shall thus be able to study this mansion again, and see how far it suits my purpose. I should also like——"

Here the speaker pushed the door open, and Mr. Dorrien stood before the pair. Although he knew they were in La Chapelle, he looked fully as much surprised as they did, and something very like displeasure seemed to mingle with his surprise, for his pale face flushed, an unusual sign of emotion, and his blue eyes lit. John Dorrien had coloured too, but he was the first to recover his composure, though not the first to speak. For one minute he stood before Mr. Dorrien, and with that rapid intuition of truth which was one of his gifts, though it availed him so little in life, he saw how and why his cousin was there. It was not merely that he wanted to purchase this house—it was that such purchase was a virtual abandonment of the scheme nearest and dearest to John Dorrien's heart; above all, it was that such pur-

chase could only have been advised by one man, and that with only one object. If Oliver Black wished to see his lost home in the hands of Mr. Dorrien, it was with the hope verging upon certainty that it should ultimately pass into his.

Mr. Dorrien was not the man to shrink from a revelation which might have been delayed, but must have come sooner or later. With a quiet but rather ironical smile, he was the first to address his cousin, and to say, in his slow, careless way,

"Well, John, are you, too, an amateur? Are you come to compete with or to bid against me?"

"I believe I need not answer that question," replied John, looking gravely at the speaker. "Are you better than when we left Paris, sir?"

"Scarcely," replied Mr. Dorrien, sinking down into Mr. Blackmore's chair, and making an apologetic bow to the agent, who stood looking and listening hard, though not understanding one word. "My dear, I beg your pardon," resumed Mr. Dorrien, addressing his granddaughter; "but you are better already—I can see it. Yes, I feel languid and ill at ease," he continued, fastening his eyes on John's face. "The fact is, I want a change—a total change—and I think I shall find it here."

"You think of buying this place?" said John.

"I do," was the brief reply. "I have all but bought it," added Mr. Dorrien, in a somewhat defiant tone.

"I trust it may suit you," answered John, still grave. "Will you dine with us this evening, sir? My mother will be glad to see you."

"Thanks," was the dry, ungracious answer, "I am tired—I shall spend the night here. Remember me to Mrs. John. I shall do myself the pleasure of calling upon her to-morrow," added Mr. Dorrien, in his old tone of cold courtesy.

"Then we will leave you," said John, with a sigh, which he did not check. "I am going back to Paris to-morrow. Can I do anything for you?"

But no, Mr. Dorrien had no need to trouble his cousin. Mr. Dorrien had left full instructions behind him, and he was obliged to John all the same; and Mr. Dorrien leaned back in the old leather arm-chair with a wearied air, which said so plainly, "What a dreadful bore is all this!" that Antoinette instinctively drew near to John, and slipped her arm within his. There was no help for it. They must bid Mr. Dorrien a good afternoon, and leave him; and so they did, the agent still looking at the three with his head on one side, and a perplexed meaning on his face.

They went down the steps in silence ; they walked out at the gate without having spoken one word, and they turned their back on the old house, and left it far behind—so far that neither its tall chimney stacks nor its background of ancient trees were visible, and still that significant silence was not broken by either. At length John stood still, and he looked at Antoinette, and her heart leaped, and though she knew not why, she felt that her doom was at hand. She looked around her, in the vain hope that some passer-by would delay the evil hour ; but no one was coming—not a step was to be heard—not even a bird was twittering on the boughs of the tree near whose aged roots they stood, and whose wide-spreading branches shadowed the lonely lane.

“ Oh, have pity on me ! ” she was tempted to cry—“ have pity, John ! ”

But the words were not spoken, and she gazed resignedly and steadily at a patch of blue sky, and said to herself, “ I must bear it.”

“ Antoinette,” said John, after a long pause, “ I have something to say to you—or, rather, a question to put. You remember the night when you were out in the garden, and got so wet, and came into the library ?—I went to fetch you some wine ?—I met Mr. Dorrien, who came back with me ; you had heard his voice, no doubt, for

you were gone. I ascertained, after he had left me, that you had made your escape through the next room; but before you left that room, Antoinette, did you hear what passed between Mr. Dorrien and me?"

Antoinette turned pale as death. The dream of happy rest she had been indulging in fled on rapid wing as he spoke, and all the grief, all the shame of her old life, came back with the memory of that night.

"Yes," she answered, after a pause; "I did hear part of what you said; but I left before Mr. Dorrien went away, and so I did not hear all."

"Did you repeat to anyone what you did hear?" he asked, hesitatingly. "To Mademoiselle Mélanie—or to anyone?"

Antoinette looked at him with the keenest sorrow.

"Oh, John," she said, "I cannot bear that! I know what you mean. There has been some treason or other, and you suspect me of it."

"No, no," he interrupted quickly; "you may have abetted it unconsciously, Antoinette; of anything deliberate, I acquit you."

"Acquit me of nothing," she answered, bowing her head, whilst tears streamed down her face. "You do not know how I have wronged you——"

"I know all," he said, without looking at her. "I have seen it all almost from the first day. It has been hard to bear, for he was my friend, and I had some trust in him; but I have borne it, you see. Your share in that I freely forgive. Forget it, Antoinette, forget it."

"Forget the humiliation and the shame?" she cried passionately—"never—never!"

"Forget it," he said again. "It was the error of inexperience and youth."

"No, no, it was worse—it was ten times worse," she said, impetuously. "Oh! John, I will tell you what it was. I stood safe on the shore, but would not stay there. I would enter the worst boat that ever bore human freight, and now I am drifting down a sea of trouble and care, and I cannot help it, and no one can help it. I may reach land again and stand upon the shore; but when I do—when I do—" she paused, and looked in John Dorrien's face—"it will be after such a wreck of all worth having, that life will seem poor—for, John, I shall have ruined you."

She paused, then resumed, in a low, sad tone:

"I have been all wrong, and yet—and yet, if I had had a brother like you, John, I should never have done it—one who would have shown me right, and warned me against wrong. Oh, then I could not have done it!"

She looked up at him with a girl's dangerous adoration in her dark eyes! Poor Antoinette! she had not much of her generation in her; she was warm-hearted, she was ardent and impassioned, and though she could be guilty, she could never be mean or calculating.

"But you forgive me?" she added, after a pause.

"Entirely," he said, gravely; "but yet let me question you. Mr. Dorrien and I spoke of a business matter, which was then, and is still, a secret. Did you hear us?"

She was silent a while.

"I believe I did," she answered, "but I am not sure—I do not know. I am only sure that I repeated nothing, John—pray do believe that I did not."

The pathos of her look and tone moved him to the very heart.

"Do not wonder at my questioning you so long, Antoinette," he said, sadly; "but I stand on the edge of a pit, and though I believe I know the hand that has led me to it, I do not care to wrong even that treacherous hand by an unjust doubt."

They were walking on. Antoinete stood still to give him a scared look.

"Surely, John, it is not so bad as that with you!" said she.

"Surely, my little friend," he answered, in a tone of half jest and half earnest, "you see how it is with Mr. Dorrien and with me?"

"Oh! John, John, do not break my heart!" she cried, full of sorrow. "Let me not think that I have undone you."

He was silent. He could not say that she had not helped to ruin him. He forgave her, but the truth was the truth, and he could not deny it.

"Oh, John! do not think me worse than I am. Let me tell you all," she entreated.

"Not now," said he, with a sigh. "Whatever you tell me, Antoinette, do not tell me from a passing impulse, which you would repent the next moment. Besides, do not think that your telling me anything can help me now; it is too late."

She was silent.

"And yet," she thought, as they walked on, "I must tell him; not this moment, but this evening, by the sea. I will not betray Oliver, but I must tell him something; I have been wicked, but he must not think me a traitor."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. DORRIEN had seen her son and Antoinette depart with very pleasing anticipations. They looked so cheerful and so happy, and a walk in the country was the very thing to bring matters to a crisis. Antoinette's face, as she turned round to give Mrs. Dorrien a last nod, looked decidedly pretty under her little hat; and John's eyes, as John's mother saw with involuntary jealousy, were certainly admiring eyes. No doubt he would speak to his young cousin before returning to Paris, and Mrs. Dorrien did not fear for the success of his suit. She had been watching Antoinette for some time back, and was convinced that the young girl liked her son. There had come a shyness over her in his presence, a certain timidity when he addressed her, which Mrs. Reginald had not noticed, but which Mrs. Dorrien had certainly perceived, and interpreted rightly. Antoinette had not acknowledged it

to herself, but it was so. Involuntarily, but none the less surely, she had been learning to give John that place in her thoughts which a woman only gives to the man she prefers. He had become her standard of excellence, her right and wrong, her friend and protector. She mentally appealed to and relied upon him—the worship was not spoken, but it was there; the worship which she had once tried to give Oliver Black, but which, even from the first, he had forced back to its fountain-head. Mrs. Dorrien little suspected the sad obstacle which Antoinette's own hand had placed between herself and John Dorrien; she thought that her son had but to speak and win. She was vexed at his dilatoriness, especially at the delay the partnership thereby suffered.

When the pair came in to dinner, grave, silent, and abstracted, nothing could exceed Mrs. Dorrien's dismay. She could put but one construction on a change so great and so sudden: John had spoken, and, incredible though it might seem, he had been rejected. But was it possible? She watched her son and Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter, and, though there was a change in both, she could trace no unfriendliness; far from it. There was something in Antoinette's eyes as they rested upon John so mournful and so deprecating that it precluded

the idea of rejection. And yet, if it were not that, what could it be? Mrs. Dorrien was perplexing herself with many useless surmises when, as they sat down to dinner, John said quietly,

"Mr. Dorrien is here. I wanted him to come and dine with us, but I fancy he felt too tired. He will call upon you to-morrow, little mother."

Mrs. Dorrien was overwhelmed with surprise, but John's further explanations were so quietly given as to rouse no alarm in his mother's mind. She had always wondered that Mr. Dorrien did not indulge himself with a country house; that he should think of doing so now was a tribute to her judgment which she appreciated.

"Quite right," she said, approvingly; "La Chapelle, I am sure, is a charming place. I am glad Mr. Dorrien has chosen this part of France."

It was plain that she considered Mr. Dorrien's country house as the future resort of the whole family, and that her approbation was given on that understanding. But as the dinner progressed, and John remained grave, and Antoinette continued to look sad, Mrs. Dorrien's mood underwent a change. She wondered that Mr. Dorrien had kept both his resolve and

his journey a secret from her son, and she began to fear that his having done so could bode no good. So uneasy did she grow, that, when John and Antoinette prepared to go out after dinner, in order to have their look at the sea, Mrs. Dorrien, who had declined to join them, suddenly called her son back, apologetically saying to Antoinette,

"Only for a few moments, dear; he will soon overtake you."

Antoinette went on alone. She felt utterly sad and depressed, and walked with slow steps and downcast eyes to the shore. The sky, so blue in the morning, had become overcast, and heavy clouds were drifting above the sullen green line of the horizon. Oh! ye wild northern seas, with the tempest ever brooding above you, how forcibly ye speak to the heart of the tried and the sorrowful!

Antoinette sat down on the shingle, waiting for John, and wondering what she should say to him. The tide was coming in with a low, deep roar, and a long white ridge of foam.

She looked at the moaning waves, and she thought over her hard, hard lot. The grand sternness of the lonely shore seemed to forbid all hope of a gentler fate. The sea beat against the rocks, and they frowned back at the sea, wild sea-mews flew past on silent wings, and the

low clouds of the stormy sky seemed bending down to the heaving billows, and it was all so vast and so desolate that Antoinette felt, "I am undone, whatever I do. If I tell him about Oliver he will despise me for a double treason; and if I do not tell him, will he not think that I was the traitor?"

Either thought was very bitter. She buried her face in her hands, and let her tears flow, till the sound of a step on the shingle roused her suddenly, and she started to her feet, flushed and ashamed to be so seen by him; but it was not on John's pale, grave face that the waning light of that sullen day now fell. That light showed Antoinette the well-known but unwelcome features of Mademoiselle Mélanie. She was too much amazed to speak, and her surprise, and its unpleasant nature, were both so plainly written on her expressive face that Mademoiselle Mélanie, stamping recklessly on the hard stones, uttered a shrill and defying—

"Thank you!"

"Aunt, I could not help it," deprecatingly said Antoinette, timidly, going up to the irritated lady, and attempting to take her hand. "I thought it was John, and the surprise of seeing you took all my presence of mind away."

"You thought it was John!" said Mademoiselle Mélanie, mimicking her, yet speaking with

something less of anger. "Then it is John now, and not Oliver!"

"Oh! aunt," cried Antoinette, turning her burning face away, "never—never talk so. It is not John in the sense you mean, and would that it had never been Oliver!—would that I had never, never seen him!" she added, with a great rush of tears.

Her aunt looked at her, and said, coolly,

"Sit down and listen to me."

Antoinette hesitated.

"Sit down, I say," imperiously said Mademoiselle Mélanie. "Do you think I will bite you?" she angrily added.

There was nothing for it but to obey. Antoinette sat down again, and making a cushion of the shawl she carried on her arm, Mademoiselle Mélanie sat down by her.

"You did not expect me," she began. "Of course you did not; I did not know till yesterday that you were here, and that I would come. And now tell me this, are you really going to marry John?"

"To marry him, aunt? Why, he has never asked me."

"Rubbish! Are you going to marry him?"

"No," said Antoinette, in a low, sad tone. "He does not want me, and I am too proud to want him. I have behaved too badly, aunt."

"Rubbish!" said Mademoiselle Mélanie again.
"You are not going to marry Oliver, are you?"

"Never—never!" cried Antoinette, her face all in a flame with the passion of her denial.
"That sea shall swallow me first! Never!—never!"

Mademoiselle Mélanie looked at her, and smiled and nodded.

"Then marry John," she said; "marry John Dorrien."

"Aunt, do not speak so. You pain me, and it cannot be."

"You are a fool," said her aunt, scornfully.
"You have a chance there. Take it, I say."

"You did not come to tell me to do that, aunt," said Antoinette, looking at her quietly.
"You had some other purpose in coming down here."

"Yes, you little ingrate, I had!" cried Mademoiselle Mélanie, growing exasperated as Antoinette grew calm. "And do you want to know what brought me? I came to ruin you! As I can!—as I can!" she added, tauntingly.

"Well, aunt, you need only tell them what a traitor I have been; and, oh!" she added, bowing her head with shame, "how they will scorn me!"

"Oliver Black is a sneak," said Mademoiselle Mélanie, in a tone that showed the absent sinner

should bear the brunt of her wrath in his turn, "but I have an arrow in my quiver for him. Marry John, you simpleton, and you can laugh at Oliver. He dare not tell tales, for his own sake."

Antoinette looked at her.

"Aunt, what did you come here for?" she asked. "You had some object. What was it?"

"I came to ruin you," answered Mademoiselle Mélanie, coldly and deliberately—"I came to undo you, because you are the basest ingrate that ever lived—because the moment you were happy and prosperous, you turned your back on the woman who had reared you—I came for that."

Antoinette heard her calmly enough. She knew of old the violence of Mademoiselle Mélanie's temper, and she got accustomed to everything—to domestic tempests included. She knew also that though Mademoiselle Mélanie was both bitter and revengeful, she often left her threats unfulfilled; and she knew best of all that, though Mr. Dorrien had much, John had very little to learn, and so the shame in store for her had not so entire and deep a sting as it might have had if her great error had never been suspected by him.

"I came for that," resumed Mademoiselle Mélanie; "but, after all, why should I do it?"

Why should I help that little sneak, Mr. Black, up the ladder, for him to laugh down at me when he gets on the topmost rung? I have let him think that I would," added Mademoiselle Mélanie, nodding; "but he let out a thing or two that made me change my mind, as I thought over them coming along. And so now your fate lies in your own hands, and—unless you drive me to it—I will not tell."

Involuntary relief shone in Antoinette's face. To tell John herself, to open her heart and soul in voluntary confession, was one thing, and to be taxed with her guilt, and stand before him, unable to deny it, was another thing, far harder than the first to bear.

"Aunt," she said, taking her aunt's hand, and looking in her face with eyes full of entreaty, "do not, oh! do not tell it. I was wrong, but I knew no better, and——"

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mademoiselle Mélanie, snatching her hand away with a frown—"what folly are you talking of?"

"What are *you* talking of, aunt?"

"Then Oliver did not tell you—of course not—forewarned is forearmed. Mr. Black was too clever to tell, and I—I was a fool to let it out to him."

A great unknown dread now fell on Antoinette. Some calamity, of which she felt the

coming, as we feel the coming of the storm, was at hand ; but she had no conception of its nature, and Mademoiselle Mélanie seemed in no hurry to enlighten her.

"Marry John," she said—"marry him as soon as you can, or *he* will be too much for you both."

"I shall never marry John," replied Antoinette, in a voice full of sorrow. "I believe he might have liked me, I believe I might have had my chance, but I cast it by, and it will not come back. John will marry Mademoiselle Basnage, or some one else, and why should I complain ? I have behaved so badly that I cannot bear to look in his face ; and what have I to recommend me, save that I am Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter ?"

Mademoiselle Mélanie laughed a long, scornful laugh, which echoed among the rocks and along the lonely shore.

"And are you that ?" she asked mockingly. "Why, you simpleton, do you not know that you are my brother's child, and that I came down here to give you a last chance. Marry John, I say, and do not forget again what you owe to me, or I will make you repent it—I will make you repent it !"

She spoke coolly enough. And indeed, living though she did in a storm of contradictory passions, she had come to the shrewd conclusion

that to spare Antoinette and give up both Oliver and her revenge was the wisest plan after all. What hold would she have on Oliver Black, once he had used her for his own purposes?—and what hold would she not have on Antoinette by telling her this thing, and making her live in perpetual fear of her power? But plainly though she had spoken, Antoinette seemed unable to realize her meaning—she only looked in her aunt's face and smiled.

"Oh! aunt," she said, with strange tranquillity, "how can you say anything so improbable and so wild?"

"Oh! it is wild, is it?" cried Mademoiselle Mélanie, getting into one of her sudden rages. "And, Antoinette Dorrien, the real one did not die in Italy, and she was not buried there under her own name, and I cannot prove it; and I am wild, and you are Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter, are you?"

"But why should you have done it?" argued Antoinette, still smiling. "My sister was rich, and it was her death that made us all so poor."

"She was rich, was she?" echoed Mademoiselle Mélanie, looking amused. "Well, you would have been rich, to be sure, if your uncle had not left it all to some one else."

"But, aunt, there was a lawsuit when my

sister died—you know there was,” persisted Antoinette.

“Moonshine!”

“But surely—surely Mr. Dorrien would have known the truth of all this!”

“Of course he would, if he had asked.”

Antoinette looked at her again, and, as she looked, the smile died out of her face. Could this dreadful thing be true? Was she not merely a traitor to John Dorrien, but a poor impostor, standing between him and all that should one day be his? Was there not even between him and her that remote tie of blood which had often made her think with fond regret, “He is my cousin, after all. We spring from one stem, and are of one race. We are of the old Dorriens, John and I.”

She clasped her hands above her head; she cast a look of passionate regret around her, as if appealing to sea, earth, and sky against her hard lot, and, reckless of the shingle, she laid her head upon the stones and sobbed aloud in her sorrow.

“Don’t be a fool,” said Mademoiselle Mélanie, who was quite calm; “no one need ever know it. Mind *he* suspects it, but has not an atom of proof, and he is too clever and too keen to speak till he can prove it, which he never can; so just marry John whilst you have the chance,

and behave better to me than you have done."

There was a long pause. Antoinette was still weeping as if her heart would break, but little by little the violence of her grief expended itself, and raising her head, she looked up once more, and, turning to her aunt, said piteously,

"Oh! aunt, say that it is not true! Why should you have done this?"

"For the money, to be sure."

"But I cannot believe it—I cannot," said Antoinette. "I should remember—I know I should."

"And don't you remember that you were called Marie once—don't you remember that?"

"But you said my mother called me so to try to bring back my dead sister to her mind—you know you said it."

Antoinette's eyes flashed with triumph as she spoke, but her aunt looked at her with something like contempt.

"I know you always were the greatest simpleton," she said. "I know you could always be made to believe a lie, and that you never knew how to tell one—never knew how to tell one," she repeated, scornfully. "Who's that tall fellow coming?" she sharply added. "Is that John Dorrien?"

Antoinette looked. Yes, that was John Dor-

rien—that was the true owner of the name she had usurped, the real heir of the old house; and he was coming to them with swift and steady strides.

“I have given you a last chance,” said Mademoiselle Mélanie, rising. “As you behave to me, so will I behave to you. Take care and do not provoke me, or I shall tell it to those whom it most concerns—to Mr. Dorrien, to John Dorrien—you understand?”

“Yes, aunt,” answered Antoinette, looking sadly at the sea, “I understand.”

Mademoiselle Mélanie had risen, but she was too defiant to stir from the spot till John had come up to them. As she was moving away, after giving him a broad stare, Antoinette rose too. She went up to John Dorrien, she placed her hands on both his arms, she looked up in his face, and with tears streaming down her pale cheeks, and the most pitiful look and accent, she said,

“Oh! John, she says that I am not Antoinette Dorrien! Oh! John, she says that I am nothing—nothing to you!”

Her voice broke off in tears, and she turned her head away. Amazement kept John silent, and Mademoiselle Mélanie, who had heard every word, turned back in speechless wrath. She had never expected this; she had never

thought that the weapon she meant to use would be broken in her hand by Antoinette's first words.

"I do not believe it!" cried John, rallying, and his grey eyes flashing wrathfully on Mademoiselle Mélanie. "It is a mean invention to torment you."

"Oh, take her part—do!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Mélanie, turning upon him. "Do you know that she has been a traitor to you too—as great a traitor as to me? Ask her, and see if she will deny *that*!"

John Dorrien scorned to reply. He looked down at Antoinette, and, as their eyes met, she said with sorrowful simplicity,

"Yes, that is true; you were my friend, John Dorrien, and I have been your enemy all this time."

"Good night," ironically said Mademoiselle Mélanie, walking away. "Good night, Mr. John Dorrien; and good night, Mademoiselle Marie d'Armaillé."

With a short, bitter laugh, in which the bitterness was as much for her own disappointment as in mockery for their trouble, she left them. Not one word did John speak till she was out of sight, and then he said, very kindly,

"Sit down, Antoinette, and tell me all about it."

She sat down as he bade her, and, looking at the sea with her hands clasped around her knees, she told him what Mademoiselle Mélanie had said, but not all; for not to save her life, it seemed to her, could she have uttered to him the name of Oliver Black. John heard her with many a scornful and incredulous interruption.

"Take comfort," he said, warmly, "and do not believe her, Antoinette. The woman is mad, and you have vexed her, and no one—no sane man, woman, or child—could believe a tale so preposterous. You are a Dorrien, take my word for it," said he, taking one of her hands and clasping it; "you are one of us, Antoinette, and—and we will not let you go."

"How good you are, John!" she answered, giving him a wistful look—"how good you have always been to me!"

"Tell me you do not believe her," he insisted.

"Let us go home," said Antoinette, rising, with a wearied sigh; and looking around her, she added, very sorrowfully, "as long as I live, I shall never forget this spot—never, never! I was so happy here the other evening, and to-day——"

She broke down. He took her arm and led her away.

"You must not and shall not believe her!" said he, with that vehemence which every now and then broke out from beneath the forced outward calmness of his life. "How old were you when the supposed substitution is said to have taken place?" he argued, as they walked along. "Seven or eight! Well, then, it is impossible that you should not remember it. And if you do not, is it not the surest of sure proofs that this is a poor invention of that crazy lady to keep a hold upon you? Now just listen," he added, stopping in the steep path up which they were climbing, on their way to the downs, "and see how absurd it all is. Your sister was at least two or three years older than you were; you still wore mourning for her when you came to us seven years ago at the Hôtel Dorrien. How could Mr. Dorrien, Mrs. Reginald, or anyone, have taken a child of thirteen for one of ten? It is impossible—impossible!" he repeated vehemently—"a thing to laugh at, if it were not also a thing to hate for its abominable wickedness."

Antoinette said not a word, but looked at the grassy earth. They walked on; he resumed:

"Besides, do you not see her object? Why, it is so transparent that a child could read through it. Her hold over you is loosening, as

it must loosen, for she has no real claim upon you. She is not your aunt; you owe her nothing but some bitter sorrows. The same blood does not flow in your veins, and time and circumstance must happily divide you. By inventing this tie of relationship, she maintains a hold on your affections; she also holds over you a threat which will, as she hopes, keep you in her power. Do you think she will ever go to Mr. Dorrien with this wild story? Never, never!" And John Dorrien laughed the thought to scorn.

Antoinette heard him silently. He thought he had convinced her, but, lest he should not have done so, he was seeking for new arguments, when Antoinette, speaking for the first time, said,

"John, is not this the path that leads to the *Maison Rouge*?"

They stood at the head of a silent lane, shelving down to the village between tall hawthorn hedges. The fragrant white blossoms filled the air with sweetness, and the cool wind carried it out to the sea, beyond those green-capped cliffs on which the two were now standing. A bird flew past in the grey, dusky air, and far away the sound of a church-bell came floating towards them.

"Yes, that is the path which leads to it,"

said John, looking at her in the twilight.

"Will you take me to it, John?"

"Why so?"

"I want to see Mr. Dorrien."

"What for?"

"To tell him."

"For the love of heaven, think of what you are doing!" said John, much moved.

"Yes," she answered, with a heavy sigh, "I do." Then she added, "Take me there, John."

"Oh, Antoinette!" he sorrowfully said, "you are undoing us both."

"No, John, not you—not you," she replied, raising her dark eyes to his face with a look of involuntary tenderness.

He was too much distressed to speak. His arguments all failed him now that he saw they had not convinced her; his conscience forbade him to influence her against the dictates of her own. He made but one effort more. The lane grew darker as they went down its rugged path, and the gloomiest part—that where tall trees met and made perpetual shade—was also that whence they could see the old house rising in its hue of dusky red from among its mass of dark foliage.

"Antoinette," he said, with much emotion, "do think of what you are doing. Mr. Dorrien will wish to be just to you, but——"

"John," she interrupted, "from the first day that I entered his house to this, I have been a deceiver. I have not told even you the whole truth—I could not, John—I could not. I cannot tell it to him; but in this thing at least I can be true. Oh! John, let me be true!"

"Be true, then," he answered, with some passion; "and whoever you are, and whatever you have done, may God bless you, because you will be true."

He took her in his arms, and for the first time since they were children, he kissed her sad, pale face. If he loved her, it was something beyond love that he felt just then; and if she loved him, it was something more than love that made her yield to the caress. After many a wandering in the land of care and error, they were meeting at last on the threshold of a divine passion. They might part again—part for ever, though each cast longing looks behind at the other—but they never could forget that moment—never, so long as each had a beating human heart!

"Do not wait for me," she said, slipping away from him; "I shall know my way home."

She went away swiftly, leaving him there, looking after her with eyes full of tenderness, pity, and sorrow.

CHAPTER XV.

“COME in.”

So spoke Mr. Dorrien's voice in surprised tones as, sitting alone in the dining-room where John and Antoinette had left him a few hours before, he heard a knock at the door. The door opened at his summons, and the light of the lamp by which he was looking at some papers left by the agent for his inspection, showed him the slender figure and pale face of his young granddaughter. He recognised her at once, and looked almost displeased.

“Excuse me,” he said, drily, “I had no conception it was you; I was looking at these papers. What pressing business can bring you at this hour, my dear?”

She paused. His look, voice, and manner were not encouraging. Mr. Dorrien had never liked her, and he was not in the mood, perhaps, to reject Mademoiselle Mélanie's story. Antoinette's hand was still on the door-handle; she had but to turn it and be out of the room again,

and leave it all for another and a better day. But she did not do so.

"I am sorry to intrude, sir," she said, in a low tone, "but I shall not stay long. Mademoiselle Mélanie has just been here," she added, hesitating,—“oh! I do not mean in this house; I mean in La Chapelle. She found me by the sea-shore, and talked to me there.”

"I thought I had forbidden all intercourse between you and that lady," sharply remarked Mr. Dorrien.

"Yes," said Antoinette, in a low, even voice, "you did, sir; but she came for all that, and spoke to me, as I sat by the sea-shore."

"Was Mr. John Dorrien there?" asked Mr. Dorrien, in the same sharp tone.

"She left me when he came."

There was a pause.

"Miss Dorrien," said Mr. Dorrien, slowly and deliberately, "this thing must never happen again, never, or you will have to abide by consequences which I do not wish to allude to. Once for all, it must never happen again."

Antoinette looked wistfully in his face.

"Perhaps it will not happen again," said she, "for she came to say that I am not your son's child, but my mother's daughter by her first husband. Not Antoinette Dorrien, but Marie d'Armaillé."

Mr. Dorrien, who had risen, sat down again, and stared at Antoinette for a moment in blank surprise.

"This is a most extraordinary tale," he said, rising again, and confronting her. "Pray how does Mademoiselle Mélanie substantiate it?"

"She says that Antoinette died in Italy, and that I was substituted for her there."

"For what motive?"

"For the money."

Antoinette spoke very low, and with shame on her downcast face.

"Yes, of course, for the money," said Mr. Dorrien, with bitter emphasis. "That is to say, if this wild story be true," he added, correcting himself, "which I much doubt—which I much doubt, I assure you, my dear."

He said that he doubted it, but Antoinette, looking in his face, seemed to read there something that was not doubt, something that was more like the dawning of a hope.

"This is no sorry jest, I suppose?" he added, after a pause.

"My aunt was not jesting, sir."

"It is absurd, quite absurd," said Mr. Dorrien, impatiently. "I wonder, I really do, that you, Miss Dorrien, should have come to repeat this mad story. Of course *you* know nothing on the subject?" he added, looking keenly at her.

"No, I know nothing," answered Antoinette, sorrowfully. "I was ill when my sister died, and long after it, and I remember nothing, only——"

She paused, and her voice broke down rather suddenly.

"Only!" echoed Mr. Dorrien, with eager, watchful eyes,—eyes very unlike those cold blue eyes which he showed in daily life—"only what?"

"Only," said Antoinette, straightening her slender form, as if to nerve herself against the blow her own hand was going to inflict—"only it is like a dream to me, that once, long ago, I was called Marie."

"And that was the name of Count d'Armaillé's daughter?"

"Yes," she answered, looking in his face, "it was her name."

She did not, she could not mistake the flash of glad surprise which came into his eyes, the meaning full of relief that passed over his cold features as he heard her.

"A very wild, improbable story," said he, resuming his usual manner, "but a matter that must he looked into, for your sake. I trust, indeed I feel sure, that, when it is investigated, we shall find that the poor lady has invented or dreamed all this. The mere fact of her

coming here to tell you this absurd story shows that she is not in her right mind, Is she still in La Chapelle?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Of course she is—down at the hotel. She cannot be gone, since the coach does not leave till to-morrow; but she may have hired a private carriage. You have no idea at what hotel she is stopping?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Well, there are but two, so she will be easily discovered. And now, my dear, good evening, and do not distress yourself. This foolish story will melt away. You did not come here alone, of course?"

"John came with me, and——"

"He is waiting outside, like a true knight, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Dorrien, with unusual gaiety. "Well, good night once more."

He held out his hand. Antoinette passively placed hers within it, and said,

"If it be true, sir, I knew nothing about it."

"True! Nonsense; do not think of it."

"I knew nothing about it," she resumed, as if he had not spoken, "but I thought it right to come and tell you at once."

He was going to answer, but the sad gravity of her face silenced him. She did not wait for this feeling to pass away from him. She open-

ed the door, and left the room, without having passed the spot on which she had spoken her doom with her own lips. Mr. Dorrien, though taken by surprise, soon recovered. He followed her out.

"Miss Dorrien, is—is John there?" he asked. "I trust you are not alone?"

But Antoinette did not answer. She was already gone. Mr. Dorrien went in for his hat and came out again. He had soon reached the gate. Antoinette was invisible, still Mr. Dorrien went on, walking fast. He did not think of overtaking her; evidently it was not needful that he should do so. John was with her, of course. Mr. Dorrien was merely going to the village to hear what Mademoiselle Mélanie had to say.

All the time Antoinette was speaking to Mr. Dorrien she had felt like one in a dream, and like one in a dream she walked out of the house, but instead of going down the steps that led to the avenue, she went out through another door and found herself in a flower-garden. She did not pause for this. Where was she going? She did not know, she did not care, everything seemed equal to her now. She did not go far astray after all. The garden opened into the grounds, and, from the spot where she entered them, she saw in the pale

light of a clouded sky the white road that led to the village. She crossed over to it, and had soon reached the high-street of La Chapelle. The old grey stone church stood before her, and she saw its little belfry rise in dark outlines on the leaden sky and in the silent air. The open space around the church was almost deserted, for this was the supper-time, and lights burned in every happy little home. Antoinette stood and gave these poor dwellings a desolate, despairing look. This was her bitter hour—that hour, scarcely less certain than death, which comes to every human life. She felt like a solitary outcast. She felt that, whilst every human being in these houses of shingle and thatch was blessed in the sweetest of home ties, she was as one having neither kith nor kin. She stood sad, though tearless, looking straight before her at one light brighter than the rest, unconscious at first that the darkness she was facing was that of the church porch, unaware that the light which twinkled beyond that gloom belonged to no human home, but was that which burned in silent and solitary worship before the altar. When she knew it, a great passionate sob heaved her bosom, a great longing for tears and relief came over her. She walked in like a little child led by its Father's hand, and how or why she knew not, but she

was on her knees weeping and praying to that unknown God of whom the Apostle told the Athenians, and whom she had found at last.

CHAPTER XVI.

“OH ! my God, have I found thee !”

In the midst of all her grief, that was the joyful cry which rose from the stricken girl's heart. The soul that has no God is like Mary Magdalen seeking her lost one, and it utters the same pathetic lament : “ They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.” And now she had found him, and she could weep and pray at his feet. Faith had come to her at last. Mrs. Reginald's dogmatism had not done much to convince her. Mere reason which cannot define Time and Eternity never bore us safely yet to the awful shores of the Infinite. It ever leaves something untold, something which love alone makes clear, and which it tells best to the heart pierced by sorrow. And love had come to Antoinette. That love which has fired the hearts of saints and martyrs, and filled them

with raptures and a strange delight, had prevailed over her. In one hour she had lost all and won all. Her earthly inheritance, and with it every latent hope, had perished, but she had got a glimpse of Heaven, and with that glimpse to greet her upward gaze, she felt that she could walk bravely through the thorns and briars of earth. She stayed a long time thus weeping, yet happy. Grieving, yet without a care; and when she rose at last, and walked out into the open air, there was a calm so perfect in her whole being that she asked herself if trouble or unquietness could ever come near her again. The night had cleared, and the cloudless sky was all bright with stars, and Antoinette smiled up at them with a joyful boast in her heart.

"I am more than you are," thought she; "you may burn on when I am dead, but I am more than you are, and I will not envy you now,—oh! never, never!"

"Well," said John's voice at her side, as his arm was passed through hers.

At once Antoinette came down from the heights to which she was soaring.

"Oh! John," she could not help saying, "where then were you?"

"Waiting for you in the church," he answered. "You have seen Mr. Dorrien, I suppose?"

"Yes, I have seen him."

"Well?" he said, anxiously.

"Well," she answered, in a tranquil tone that struck him, "Mr. Dorrien believes it."

"He believes it!"

"Yes, and he wants to believe it, John; and—and—I feel that it is true."

John said not a word; but after walking on with her awhile, he withdrew his arm from hers, though he still walked by her side. Antoinette's heart sank. Had she really lost all for honour's sake? Was she to be disowned by Mr. Dorrien, betrayed by Oliver, and, hardest of all, forsaken by John, for this sin of which she was guiltless? Perhaps—oh! bitter, most bitter thought!—perhaps he believed that she had been her aunt's accomplice, and that repentance had come with the certainty of discovery. She could not bear the thought, and as they approached the cottage she was going to address him, and utter a pitiful protest, when he suddenly stood still, and, speaking low, said, as he took her hand,

"There is nothing to divide us now—nothing."

She did not understand at once, and, when she did, her first impulse was to save him from his own undoing.

"Oh! John," she cried, freeing her hand

from his, "do you think I am so mean as to let you ruin yourself for me! Mr. Dorrien would never forgive you."

"What matter," answered John, "so I have you?"

His voice, though low, was even and deliberate. For the first time, Antoinette felt that he loved her. She had hoped it sometimes; she was sure now, and joy and fear divided her being.

"Do not—do not!" she entreated. "Say no more—tell me nothing—do not tempt me!"

For her whole soul, her whole heart, went forth to him as she spoke these words of denial. What! He whom she had so honoured, so worshipped,—he loved her! He! the king of her thoughts, the hero of her young imagination,—he loved her! It was like being crowned Queen, raised up on dazzling heights, and having to sink back, humiliated and discrowned, into unutterable depths of darkness.

"You were promised to me when you were a little child," he said, jealously. "I have held you to be mine all these years. I will risk anything in this world before I give you up."

Alas! he was very mortal after all, and the girl he liked was more to him just then than the firm of the Dorriens. The love which had slumbered in her breast wakened at the call of

his, as smouldering fire kindles into fresh life at the touch of a new flame. But with love came sorrow, so keen that it was spoken in words of much bitterness.

"What is there left of me?" she asked. "For six months I have been steeped in wickedness. Tell me, then, if you can, what there is left of me for a man like you to take?"

John Dorrien was deeply moved.

"Your poor little feet were caught in a cruel net," he said, "but surely you did your best to be free. Oh! Antoinette, let us forget it all now, and be happy at last."

"Oh, I cannot have been all bad!" she could not help exclaiming, "or you would not care for me so much. And yet, how I have sinned against you!"

"What matter, if I forgive it?" he replied.

She knew she ought to resist him, but she did not know how to do so. She knew that her love was a fatal gift, and she could not keep it back, or say him nay.

"Perhaps I shall be better able to hold my own against him to-morrow," she thought. "God will surely help me."

And help did come to her, sooner than she hoped—sooner, perhaps, than, in the weakness of her heart, she wished for it. As they reached the cottage gate, she suddenly stood still,

and with her hand on the latch, "John, John," she said, passionately, "this must not be—never, never!"

Before he could reply, she had passed on and reached the doorway, where Mrs. Dorrien stood anxiously waiting for the belated pair, peering out into the chill Spring night with a shawl on her head.

"My dear, I have been so anxious," she began; but Antoinette only passed by her with a pale, tear-stained face, on which the light burning on the table shone as she went through the room.

"Oh! John, what is the matter?" said the poor lady, looking anxiously at her son.

He could not bear to trouble her, but chiding her tenderly for exposing herself to the night air, he said, so quietly that her fears subsided at the sound of his voice,

"Were you uneasy, little mother? I am sorry; but Antoinette went again to La Maison Rouge. She wanted to speak to Mr. Dorrien, and—and I fear he was not kind," said John, with a sigh.

Mrs. Dorrien could not help feeling relieved that Antoinette, and not John, was in disgrace. Indeed, concluding, as she did, that Antoinette's difficulties with Mr. Dorrien must all come from some bad behaviour of hers to John, she

felt little inclined to pity that young lady for her grandfather's severity.

"My dear boy," she fondly said, "I fear that poor child is a great worry to you."

"Perhaps I like her none the less for that," answered John, trying to speak gaily.

It was plain that he would say no more, and Mrs. Dorrien had got accustomed to his reserve, and she submitted to it now, though she would dearly have liked to know what was going on. She would certainly have questioned Antoinette, could she have had the opportunity of doing so, but the young girl did not leave her room that evening, and Mrs. Dorrien gazed wonderingly at her son, who sat in silence for an hour, staring at a newspaper, and not reading a line, looking by no means depressed, but evidently absorbed in thought.

"John," she could not help saying at length, "what is it? Has Antoinette rejected you?"

"Yes, little mother, she has," he answered, gravely; "but do not trouble about it."

"I am sure she likes you," indignantly interrupted his mother. "I am sure it is all caprice."

"Oh, no, it is not caprice," he said, with a half-sigh; "but, little mother," he added, fastening his kind grey eyes on her face, "she, and not I, must tell you her own story to-morrow."

Mrs. Dorrien so far took the hint that, the moment she heard Antoinette move in her room the next morning, she tapped at her door and asked for admittance, which was at once granted. Antoinette was combing out her long dark hair, and looked as white as her morning-gown. Mrs. Dorrien gave her a furtive look, sat down like one who has come to stay, and said, dolefully,

"My dear, why have you been so unkind to my poor boy? I am sure you like him; and really, when I see how ill you look, and when, as I know, he had no sleep last night, and looked quite worn out when he went out this morning——"

"Where is he gone to?" asked Antoinette, breathlessly.

"To Mr. Dorrien's, of course, but you may be sure——"

"Oh! Mrs. John, he is undone—undone!" cried Antoinette, letting her arms fall down. "He is undone, and it is all for me—for me!" she moaned, throwing herself across the bed in her despair.

With consternation in her looks Mrs. Dorrien now heard Antoinette's story.

"I meant to see him again this morning," said Antoinette, pitifully. "I meant to tell him again that it could never be; and now he is

gone, and Mr. Dorrien will never forgive him."

He was gone indeed, gone without seeing her again—gone resolved to have his way at every cost and every risk. But John, though resolved, was not sanguine. He could not but see that the tide of Mr. Dorrien's favour was setting against him, and he knew well enough that to love Antoinette was not the way to win back his master's favour. He met the agent at the gate.

"Monsieur is not within. Monsieur is in the grounds," said the man, smiling graciously. "If Monsieur will take that path it will lead him to the river, and he will probably find Monsieur there. This path, not that," he emphatically added, pointing to a little alley, which John knew too well.

With an anxious brow he walked under the shade of those trees which had seen some of the happy days of his boyhood. Mr. Blackmore's genial, handsome face and portly figure seemed to rise before him, reminding him of past kindness, and pleading for his boy. John Dorrien's heart was bitter enough against the friend of his youth. The Christian virtue of forgiveness is not reached without effort by the fallen Adam within us. To feel keenly past benefits is also to feel keenly a great wrong, and to be betrayed in love, in trust, and in fortune is more

than the most patient of men can bear. So John Dorrien felt strong resentment rising within him at everything that recalled Oliver, and with him his baseness. Only one thing could lessen that bitter anger, the consciousness that the traitor had never been able to deceive him entirely. From the first he had suspected a secret understanding between Oliver and Antoinette. He had no proof to build upon, but his intuitions of truth were quick and sure, and he was accustomed to trust them. If such were the case, if his friend had robbed him of the girl promised to him, the conclusion to be drawn thence was easy to reach. How could Oliver want Antoinette, if he did not want John's position? But to see this danger had not also been to see the means of averting it. Self-love, moreover, which misleads us all, had led John Dorrien into strange error. He was conscious of his superiority over his enemy, and he had not believed that Mr. Dorrien could commit the mistake of preferring Oliver Black to himself. What! set by not merely his years of faithful service, but also his undoubted talent and energy and past success—the thing seemed too absurd for a moment's thought! For, after all, what had Oliver to recommend him? a pleasing person, a flattering tongue, and doubtful birth, no means, and average talents. Were these the

gifts that could replace the name of Dorrien, and the experience purchased by eight years of toil? Was this the dowry which could give a penniless adventurer the hand of Mr. Dorrien's granddaughter? Surely not. So John could look down on the ambitious hopes of his false friend with the scornful amusement of a man whom treason cannot reach. The only doubt he had was of Antoinette's liking. For that he fought keenly; man-like, he wished for her none the less that another had stolen her from him. She was his, doubly his. He had brought her to the house, he had taken her from her poor home, conquered her grandfather's reluctance to have her near him, and he would not give her up. So he did his best; not in words, nor even much in actions, but in these hundred subtle ways by which a man, young and pleasing, knows that he can reach a girl's heart. And John was not so blind as not to see in time that he had succeeded. He was not so modest that he did not perceive the involuntary gladness in that girl's face when she saw him, even as he detected, with secret triumph, the cloud of trouble and care that came over it when Oliver Black was by. This victory fully avenged him as he thought against the schemer. John being secure could feel very magnanimous, and contemptuous too, for there is a good deal of scorn

in your magnanimity. He would not see that, though Antoinette might be won, her grandfather might also be alienated; and he forgot that strange sad story of the old Grecian days, which is true of all times, the story of the Athenian who wearied of hearing Aristides called the Just.

Even now, when every object he looked at recalled the traitor, John Dorrien had no actual fear for himself. The cloud on his open face, the weight of care at his heart, were for Antoinette, and the resentment he felt was against the man who had thus avenged himself for the young girl's inconstancy. To him and to him chiefly, did John attribute Mademoiselle Mélanie's sudden revelation; and against him, and for that motive chiefly, did he cherish anger as he went to seek Mr. Dorrien. He hoped, faintly, it must be confessed, to influence him and keep her birthright for Antoinette; but, as we said, his hopes were faint, and if they failed, as he feared that fail they would, he saw much trouble before him. He walked on, calling up every proof he could muster on her side, strengthening his case as best he might, and finding most forcible arguments, if they would but convince Mr. Dorrien, until, at length, he reached that gentleman's presence.

Mr. Dorrien was walking leisurely in the sun

smoking a cigar. He was not fond of smoking, but he had taken to it of late, for a restlessness and a love of change, and of all he had shunned till then, had grown upon him, and altered all his old habits. He took out his cigar, and held out his hand to John in friendly and easy welcome, and he said, with unusual lightness and airiness of manner :

"Well, John, I am perfectly smitten with this place. I never saw anything so prettily pastoral; you know," with a sigh, "that circumstances, and no choice of mine, made a man of business of me, and all my old tastes are gratified in his little bit of Normandy. That glimpse of water there beyond in shade and sunshine, those old trees and that pale sky, are like a perpetual Gainsborough to look at. I like it exceedingly. Do you?"

"Very much so, sir. I always did like this place I mean, in Mr. Blackmore's time."

"Then I hope you will like it too in Mr. Dorrien's time," cheerfully replied Mr. Dorrien, "for I have made up my mind."

"You mean to purchase it?"

"I do—indeed my word is passed."

There was a pause. John Dorrien flushed painfully.

"What becomes of the paper-mill, then?" he asked. The question was a useless one, but not

for worlds could he have helped putting it. Mr. Dorrien raised his eyebrows, and looked as if he thought that John's paper-mill was in a very remote landscape indeed. Evidently that Gainsborough was not one he cared to possess.

"I suppose the paper-mill remains where we found it?" he answered at length. "My dear John," he added, waving his cigar, and speaking more airily than ever. "You meant well, of course; but you went wild about that paper-mill—perfectly wild. You always do carry, or want to carry out, your ideas to excess. You are too imaginative. I believe you began as a poet: well, the faculty, a beautiful but unsafe one, of looking at things ideally, clings to you still."

"Excuse me, sir—I brought figures and facts——"

"And I went into both," interrupted Mr. Dorrien, with a touch of impatience, as if the mere recollection bored him exceedingly. "I went into both, and found them all wrong. I also examined the matter myself from another point of view, and I found that your estimates would not stand the test of plain common-sense."

"May I ask who found you the facts and figures that led you to that conclusion?" said John, with some indignation.

"Mr. Black. I requested him to do so."

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"Mr. Black. I requested him to do so."

Mr. Dorrien answered John's question without the least hesitation—in the tone of a master who will admit of no contradiction, and John felt that his position in *La Maison Dorrien* was an altered one indeed. Still he was too manly and too spirited to give in without a struggle, and he said, in a tone as cool as that of Mr. Dorrien,

“If you will go into the matter again, sir, you will find that Mr. Black, and not I, was mistaken.”

Mr. Dorrien looked amazed.

“I tell you, John,” he said, fretfully, but much more in his old manner of arguing against his young cousin's views than in that new manner of putting him down—“I tell you that I am tired of extending this business more and more, and that I think it time for me to enjoy some of the fruits of a long life of labour and self-denial. Your paper-mill is an awful risk, and little profit, even if it should prove successful.”

“It would put the house out of the power of Monsieur Basnage, and on another footing than that which it has now,” warmly said John.

Mr. Dorrien smiled superciliously.

“We will not argue the case out, John,” he said; “my mind is made up. Any news from Paris?”

“None. I mean to go this afternoon. I shall

leave my mother and Miss Dorrien here, of course."

"Miss Dorrien," echoed Mr. Dorrien, drily; "you mean Mademoiselle d'Armaillé."

"Are you sure that it is so?" asked John, much downcast.

"Quite sure," coolly answered Mr. Dorrien. "I saw Mademoiselle Mélanie last night, and she quite satisfied me—indeed, gave me a written acknowledgment."

"Is she a person to be trusted, sir?" asked John, rather indignantly.

"Of course not; but there are ways of discovering the truth, and I feel certain—I always had a strange, vague doubt—I feel certain that this poor girl is not my son's child. I have not yet decided what I shall do for her; but of course, having received her in my house as Miss Dorrien, I shall not cut her off and send her adrift."

"But this may be the merest falsehood," urged John warmly. "Allow me to ask what proofs Mademoiselle Mélanie brought forward?"

"Allow me not to discuss that matter," interrupted Mr. Dorrien. "I believe I am quite capable of settling my family affairs without any assistance."

His tone, look, and manner were aggressive;

but John took up the glove without a second's hesitation.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dorrien, but does not this matter concern me too?"

Mr. Dorrien raised his eyebrows, and was at a loss to understand Mr. John Dorrien's meaning.

"My meaning, sir, is one which you first urged upon me, which you have long known, which the last eight months have rendered dearer to me every day; my meaning is that I love her very much, and hope to marry her."

"Indeed," said Mr. Dorrien, showing no surprise whatever. "You really hope to marry a penniless girl, the daughter of an adventurer, the niece of Mademoiselle Mélanie? Allow me to wonder at such a hope coming from you, and especially at your choice of a family connexion."

"It was your granddaughter whom I chose, sir," answered John, colouring deeply. "That she should not be what we both thought her, is her misfortune, not her fault. As your granddaughter I learned to love her, and I cannot learn to unlove her now."

"Well, you must please yourself," coldly answered Mr. Dorrien; "but, as I always found something that repelled me in this young girl, so would it be positively disagreeable for me to

see her in my house ; and if you will marry her, why, you must excuse me if I say that La Maison Dorrien cannot be your home. I have no doubt that, with your talents and industry, you will make your way in the world—but henceforth our paths must lie apart.”

From the moment that Mr. Dorrien began to speak, John Dorrien's face took a peculiar and rather sad expression. Attack was coming, and he felt it, as the tree is said to feel the coming of the storm, and he stood erect, silent, and firm to meet it. Yet when the expected blow fell it was so crushing and so heavy that he could scarcely bear it. Scarcely, too, could he believe what his ears now told him. What! he had toiled years, he had given all his youth, mind, and energy to raise a falling house ; and now that it was raised, and he could grasp a fair, well-earned reward, he was laid by, as the tool is laid by when its work is done! He grasped the whole bitter truth in a moment ; Mr. Dorrien wanted him no longer, and he took this pretence of Antoinette to get rid of him. He remembered his mother's plaintive, “Why are you not a partner?” He recalled Mrs. Reginald's grave look and warning fore-finger, and Mr. Brown's cough, whenever the partnership had been mentioned, and even Oliver's significant advice ; and remembering also how, in his

generous trust, he had scorned them all, anger, shame, and sorrow filled his heart. Alas! he had been too much of a poet after all. He had forgotten that black and white and stamped papers are the man of business's gospel. He had also thought himself indispensable, and in the confidence and pardonable vanity of youth, he had held his position too secure for the safeguards of common prudence. It was useless to remonstrate with Mr. Dorrien; he knew it, and yet, in his indignation, he could not help doing so.

"Do you mean to say that the partnership which you promised me so long is not to be?" he asked. "Do you mean that, Mr. Dorrien?"

"The partnership!" echoed Mr. Dorrien, very coldly. "The partnership! Yes, of course I do mean that *that* view is at an end between us. Even if you gave up your intended marriage it would be at an end. This matter of the paper-mill has shown you to be too young and too venturesome for the responsibility. It would be the merest folly in me to give you, with your recklessness, a share in my authority. I beg that, whatever course you take, you will discard that view altogether."

And now John understood, once for all, the man before him. He was indolent, but by no means generous. He had given much power to

his young cousin because he liked his ease, but in his heart he had grudged him that dearly-bought authority. He had made himself a cipher in his own house, and he had resented it, though it was his own doing. Oliver Black had not created within him that feeling of discontent—he had only brought it to the surface, and helped it into active life.

"You mean that!" cried John, passionate tears rising to his eyes. "You mean that, after using me all these years, you are going to repay my trust in your honour after that fashion!"

Mr. Dorrien raised his eyebrows, and looked quite at a loss to understand his young relative's meaning.

"This is too absurd!" he said, at length. "You have been very useful,—I do not deny it, —but for that usefulness you have been amply paid. You were a mere lad, and not a rich one, I fancy, when I took you in hand, gave you a position, and your mother a home. Pray what more could you expect? I now choose to say that our paths must lie apart, having strong reason so to say—and you assume the tone of an injured man, on the strength of a promise which was never more than conditional."

John was too manly and too proud to contend any longer against his ungrateful master.

"Mr. Dorrien," he said, in a low tone, "I

shall thank God if, as you say, Antoinette is not your grand-daughter."

An angry flush rose to Mr. Dorrien's pale face, but John was gone before an answer could pass his lips.

The young man had not walked ten steps out of the house, when he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Mélanie.

"Well," said she, standing still before him, so as not to let him take a step, "what is she?—a Dorrien, of course."

"She is my future wife," said John, whose grey eyes flashed; "and I am sorry to say, madam, that the wife of John Dorrien must be a stranger to you."

Mademoiselle Mélanie laughed, and taking out her pocket-book, she opened it, and showed him a little bundle of bank-notes, which she flourished mockingly in his face.

"Do you see that?" said she. "I got it for telling the truth at last. The truth is a fine thing. It can bring in money—hundreds—and a few hundreds," continued Mademoiselle Mélanie, whose eyes sparkled as she thought of Monaco, "can bring in thousands and thousands," she continued, looking at him—"could bring in hundreds of thousands, if one had only a little luck."

Here her voice took a regretful ring, and she

sighed deeply. John, to whom every word she spoke was a mystery, bowed coldly and passed on.

"My love to Mrs. John Dorrien," said Mademoiselle Mélanie, raising her voice.

He did not answer, and she entered La Maison Rouge in the hope—a futile one, as it proved—of getting a few hundreds more from Mr. Dorrien.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MY poor little mother," thought John, as he entered the cottage, "how will you bear this?"

Alas! Mrs. Dorrien bore it very ill indeed.

"Oh! John," she said, forgetting that Antoinette was there, sitting in a window, with the light falling on her face of deathly paleness.

"Oh! John, my dear boy, you have been too precipitate. You should have spoken to Antoinette before you left, and——"

"Little mother," said John, interrupting her, and looking sadly in her face, "Antoinette has nothing to do with all this. She is the pretence, not the cause. Mr. Dorrien wanted to get rid of me."

"If Mrs. Reginald were only here!" exclaimed Mrs. Dorrien, clinging to impossible hope.

"And if she were, mother, she would bid me bear it like a man. Antoinette," said he, turning to her with a bright hopeful smile, "will you be a poor man's wife?"

"Surely," she replied, with a quivering lip, "I have injured you enough as it is, without doing you that wrong."

"And will you not understand," persisted John, "that you are only the pretence?"

"I am the cause too, John," was her sad reply. "Monsieur Basnage could no more forgive you for his daughter, than he could for the mill; and it has all turned against you. I was sacrificed because I would not help to ruin you, and now I must drag you down in my fall."

He heard her with strange sweetness. It was a bitter hour, but she had been true to him longer than he thought.

"Will you be a poor man's wife?" he asked again.

"Oh! Mrs. John," said Antoinette, looking at his mother, and speaking in sore distress, "will you ever be able to forgive me if I say 'Yes!'"

"My dear," answered Mrs. Dorrien, "I think this is a terrible blow; but I know that my dear boy will rise above it yet."

She spoke more bravely than she felt. Some years of ease had unfitted her for the cares of life, and her heart sank as she thought of facing them again. Especially did she grow faint-hearted after John had left them that afternoon.

"I shall soon come back," he said quietly—

"come back and fetch you both. But I have a few matters to settle first. Good-bye. God bless you!"

A few matters to settle first! Mrs. Dorrien could have groaned aloud at the meaning these words, so cheerfully uttered, conveyed. John was going to look out for a home for them, and what home could it be? Some dreadful little place on a fourth floor in a house in Paris, shabby furniture, and a *femme de ménage*; and then he would insist on marrying Antoinette at once, she was sure, and a vision of their poor domestic life, with all its trials and miseries, overwhelmed her.

John's own thoughts were hard enough. He knew life too well to indulge in many illusions. He could earn a living, but nothing like the position he had lost could he ever hope for again. It was with a grave face, not gloomy, but full of thought and care, that he crossed the threshold of that old house where he had so long ruled as a master.

The first person he saw as he crossed the court was Mr. Brown. Even in the grey light of evening, he was aware that Mr. Brown's face was troubled and careworn. Mr. Brown, indeed, had that morning received, under the shape of a telegram, such a shock as he had never felt before since he had entered La Maison

Dorrien. Twice he had headed a letter, "Mr. Oliver Black," and once he had taken off his spectacles, and kept them five minutes in his hand, staring blankly before him.

"How are you, Mr. Brown?" asked John, quietly—"well, I hope? And how is Mrs. Reginald?"

"Mrs. Reginald is very well, sir," answered Mr. Brown—"very well; but she is out, sir."

John made no reply, but went up the steps of the *perron*. Mr. Brown, with something like flurry in his aspect, turned back, and walked up with him.

"Excuse me, Mr. John," he said, "but I have got a telegram—a telegram," and he placed it in John's hands as he spoke.

It was thus worded:—

"Mr. John Dorrien no longer member of the firm; receive no orders from him. Mr. Oliver Black has full instructions how to act in J. D.'s stead."

The telegram was dated La Chapelle, and had been sent by George Dorrien to Samuel Brown.

"Well, Mr. Brown," quietly said John, "Mr. Dorrien's orders do not apply, I suppose, to the possession of my private papers in the library?"

"I hope not—I trust not," said Mr. Brown,

sorely distressed, and all the more distressed that he knew his allegiance to John had grown weak indeed of late.

"Then I shall go and take them at once," said John. "I shall not sleep here to-night," he added, with his hand on the door; "but my task may be a tedious one; I shall stay late, and I should prefer, Mr. Brown, if you were to remain and take the key of my desk from me, if you please."

"Yes, sir, by all means," readily answered Mr. Brown.

John entered the library. The grey evening light filled the place. He rang and asked for the lamp, and when the servant brought it, Carlo rushed in at the same time, whining with delight.

"I suppose I may take you away, poor little fellow," said John, patting him kindly; "and now lie there—I am busy."

The lamp had been placed on the broad table. Its clear light revealed to John Dorrien that long silent room, where he had spent many weary hours, and known many heavy cares. He unlocked his desk, and began sorting his papers. Soon the table was strewn with letters, bills, pamphlets, plans for the paper-mill, designs for notepaper, and with all the other tokens of his past life. The task of looking

through these papers was a tedious one. Many he kept, some he destroyed, others, with which he had no concern, he put by for the use of his successor. After a while, feeling rather wearied, he leaned back in his chair and rested. The sight of these papers had called up some bitter thoughts. He gazed at them as a conquered general may look at the brave dead on the battle-field. The world which hurrahs for the victorious, and laughs at the vanquished, will care little for them. What matter? He who led them on, and who knows how they gave their heart's blood at his bidding, will think kindly of those poor dead hopes, plans, and schemes, which success might have made so great, which failure has laid in the dust. "And that is the end," thought John, with a sigh—"that is the end."

Yes, that was the end of more than seven years of very hard work. That was the end of a bitter sacrifice, of fervid dreams abandoned, of bright hopes voluntarily extinguished in a proud boy's heart. Had he done well, after all? Do we not often mistake the voice of duty, and think she calls, when we only hear the echo of worldly wisdom? Had he done well? That, perhaps, was the hardest thought of all in the many hard thoughts which John Dorrien had as he sat alone that night brooding

over the irreparable past, and comparing it with what it might have been. He looked up at the little bronze figure of Polymnia, and half smiled at the cold and serene grace of the young muse.

"If I did wrong to forsake your sisters and you," thought John Dorrien, "I confess that I am punished now, and that Business has been a hard master to me. Oh! if I could go back to you! But no; it is too late—too late for ever! The fervour has been wasted, and the faith is gone."

He sighed, and resumed his task. He packed up his books. Some had belonged to his father, and had long stood on the book-shelves of his mother's poor home. How they recalled his childhood and its solitary hours, and that memorable day when he had told his mother that he would rub Aladdin's lamp for her! Others had been bequeathed to him by Mr. Ryan, and with the aspect of their worn and shabby covers came back the studious life at St. Ives, and the dangerous worship of his ardent friend. And so time passed; and when ten struck, the great gate rolled on its hinges, and a carriage entered the yard. John paused, and listened. He guessed that only the master of the house would come in thus. It was Mr. Dorrien, and Mr. Brown had gone forth to re-

ceive him—for John heard their two voices as they entered the hall.

“Is Mr. Black in the library?” asked Mr. Dorrien,—“I see a light there.”

“No, sir; it is Mr. John who is there, looking over his papers. Mr. Black came at eight, and left word that he would come back at nine; he has not been yet.”

“Send him in to me,” said Mr. Dorrien; “but first let me have a few words with you, Mr. Brown.”

A door opened, and closed again, the voices ceased, and all was once more silent in the great house. Self-possessed though he was, John felt his brow flush with a stern pain as he heard them. He had not yet left the house, and his place was already filled; and lest he should not leave it quickly enough, Mr. Dorrien had hurried his return, and was calling Oliver Black to him with indecent haste.

“Let him!” thought John; and his eyes flashed, though he was there alone—“let him! This day still is mine; Mr. Black will not dare to enter this room till I am gone.”

He resumed his task composedly enough; by eleven o'clock it was over. He locked his desk, and took out the key. It was still in his hand when the door opened abruptly, and Mrs. Reginald walked in.

"John," she said, excitedly, "you don't mean it! It's all wrong, my dear boy; Mr. Brown has been upsetting me. You can't do it. Think of your mother, you know."

She sat down as she spoke, and looked at John in such evident distress that he did not know how to tell her the truth. But it had to be told, and his friend heard him out with a downcast look and unusual silence.

"What a villain that little Mr. Black must be!" she said at length.

"And what a fool John Dorrien has been!" said John, coolly.

"My dear boy, you trusted," said she, soothingly.

"And what right had I to trust one who had always been faithless?"

"Ay, there's the rub," confessed Mrs. Reginald, "but young people will be conceited. And so it is all over, and I shall see my dear boy here no more," she added, very sadly.

Yes, it was all over; and John rang, and asked for Mr. Brown, who came, looking much crestfallen, and also much afraid of Mrs. Reginald, by whom he was eyed askance; and he took the key humbly enough, and listened to John's explanations in deferential silence; and, when this was over, John went up to his room,

and Mrs. Reginald went with him, to help him there.

"I shall see to your mother's things," said she, with a sigh. "Poor dear Mrs. John! I shall miss attending to her jellies and chickens and burgundy. I don't know why I should not leave Mr. Dorrien and join you," she added, angrily. "I never can sit at the table with that little Mr. Black, you know, John; don't tell me that I can. I shall certainly affront him. Besides, if you marry Antoinette, Mrs. John will want some one for herself—for lovers, as everyone knows, are the most odious creatures breathing—John, you don't understand packing, my dear boy. Linen always goes at the bottom, and—Who's there?"

"If you please, Mrs. Reginald," said Mr. Brown's voice outside, "will you come down to Mr. Dorrien, if you please?"

"And what does *he* want with me?" asked Mrs. Reginald, with much asperity. "I can tell you, Mr. Brown, that I am not in the best of tempers with Mr. Dorrien just now."

She obeyed the summons, nevertheless, turning back with her hand on the door to say to John:

"Linen at the bottom, John—but I shall be back directly."

"Mrs. Reginald," said Mr. Brown, in a low tone, as they stood together at the head of the stairs, "I think that Mr. Dorrien—Mr. Dorrien, you know, 'is in a fit, and have you got some smelling-salts?"

"What?" asked Mrs. Reginald, staring.

"I think that Mr. Dorrien is in a fit—a fit," repeated Mr. Brown, with unusual agitation. "I have sent for Doctor Parker, Mrs. Reginald."

Mrs. Reginald strode past him, and was downstairs in a moment. She opened the door of Mr. Dorrien's sitting-room without knocking, and at once walked to the sofa on which the master of the house half lay, motionless and pale, with fixed eyes and parted lips, and something of his weary, languid look still on his face. She took up his hand—it was inert; she let it drop, and it fell down lifeless.

"Mr. Brown," said she, "Doctor Parker may come and go; some one has been here before him. Mr. Dorrien is dead."

"The signs of death are deceitful, Mrs. Reginald," said the cool voice of Oliver Black.

Mrs. Reginald gave a start of angry surprise as she saw him; she had not perceived him till then, standing by her side with an audacious, defying smile on his handsome face. Her brown cheek flushed, her dark eye sparkled, but she did not lose her self-control.

"Mr. Brown," she said, "go for Mr. John. He is upstairs in his room. His place is here."

She said no more, but if there be language in a look, hers said very plainly, "Go, I shall stay here and watch." And after a moment's hesitation Mr. Brown obeyed her behest, for he did think that Mr. Dorrien was dead—his father had died suddenly, before the glass his hand was raising could reach his lips; his son had died with an unfinished letter before him, and Mr. Dorrien had sunk back where he lay whilst he was talking to Mr. Brown, and giving him orders for the morrow.

So Mrs. Reginald and Oliver Black were left face to face—she at the head of the sofa, and he at the foot, with the pale and silent Mr. Dorrien between them; she trying, though she knew how vain it all was, the effect of salts, vinegar, and cold water, Oliver looking on with quiet composure. The game might be lost, but he would not give it up till his last card had been played out.

Doctor Parker, who lived close by, entered the room at the same time with John Dorrien. One look at the still face, one touch at the hand already turning cold, one breathless pause to listen for the beatings of a heart that had ceased, then an impressive glance at John Dorrien.

"Sir," said he, "Mr. Dorrien is dead."

"Can nothing be tried?—is there no hope?" asked John, looking down sadly and gravely at the face that had sent him forth in such unkindness that very morning, but which had been kind in days gone by.

"There is no hope," replied Doctor Parker. "Mr. Dorrien is dead. You may remember that I foretold this result some months ago, and warned you of it."

John nodded. The room was silent. Doctor Parker was drawing on his gloves. Oliver Black addressed him suddenly.

"I suppose you have no doubt, doctor?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Doctor Parker, with a stare at this stranger, for he happened never to have met him before, "I have no doubt."

"Then it's all up," said Oliver; and taking his hat he walked out.

Mr. Brown was very much shaken by his master's death; but he was a man of business, and he felt perplexed. He beckoned John out of the room.

"Mr. John," he said, under his breath, "I have a great regard for you, as you know; but Mr. Dorrien's orders were clear, and—and I should not like to disobey them."

"Miss Dorrien is not of age, and cannot take

possession in her own person," calmly answered John ; " but——"

" Miss Dorrien," interrupted Mr. Brown, looking bewildered—" and is she a Dorrien, Mr. John ?"

For Mr. Dorrien had lost no time in telling that story.

" I really do not know," replied John ; " but I know that I am the only one who has a right to dispute her title, and that I shall not do so."

" But if she be not really Miss Dorrien," argued Mr. Brown, still perplexed.

" I am one," interrupted John, in his turn ; " forget that I was ever anything in this house, and only remember that I am the great-grandson of Mr. John Dorrien ; and if it be Mr. Black that troubles you, Mr. Brown—if you think that he will claim any authority in this house over the business—refer him to me."

But to Mr. Brown's great relief Mr. Black never came, and never claimed the key of John's desk, or the fulfilment of Mr. Dorrien's promise. From that day forth he vanished, not only from La Maison Dorrien, but also from the lives of the inmates, and was known to them no more.

The funeral was over, and John and Antoin-

ette stood together in the garden nigh the River God, who, careless of death, was bending over his urn, and pouring forth its bright waters into the basin below.

"Then, John," said she, looking wistfully up in his face, "you are master once more?"

"I—oh, I am nothing, and no one. I gave up the key of my desk to Mr. Brown. You are mistress, Antoinette."

"I! Oh, John, was I his granddaughter? You cannot say that you think I was?"

John was silent.

"Then how can I be mistress?"

"Who is to dispute your claim, Antoinette? Do you think I will?" he asked tenderly. "Mr. Dorrien made no will. I say it again—you are mistress here."

A great gush of tears came to her eyes; she laid her two hands on his arms.

"Then, if I am mistress," she said, "you are master, John—you are master."

And that was how it ended, and how John was master in the old house once more, and how Antoinette, if she was not a Dorrien, became in time a Dorrien's wife.

THE END.

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the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1999. The public sector has grown from 10% of the economy to 15% of the economy.

There is a growing emphasis on the need to improve the efficiency of the public sector. This has led to a number of initiatives, including the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices. The aim of these initiatives is to reduce the cost of public services and to improve the quality of the services provided.

One of the main challenges facing the public sector is the need to reduce the cost of services. This is a difficult task, as the public sector is often a monopoly. However, there are a number of ways in which the cost of public services can be reduced. These include the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

The introduction of competition is one of the most common ways in which the cost of public services can be reduced. This involves breaking up public monopolies and allowing private companies to compete for the business. This can lead to a reduction in the cost of services, as private companies are often more efficient than public companies.

The restructuring of public services is another way in which the cost of public services can be reduced. This involves reorganizing public services so that they are more efficient. This can be done by merging public services, by transferring public services to private companies, or by introducing new management practices.

The introduction of new management practices is a third way in which the cost of public services can be reduced. This involves introducing new management practices, such as the use of performance indicators, the introduction of new management systems, and the introduction of new management practices.

There are a number of challenges facing the public sector. These include the need to reduce the cost of services, the need to improve the quality of services, and the need to ensure that services are available to all. These challenges are being addressed by a number of initiatives, including the introduction of competition, the restructuring of public services, and the introduction of new management practices.

The public sector is a complex and challenging environment. It is a sector that is constantly evolving and that is facing a number of challenges. However, by addressing these challenges, the public sector can continue to provide the services that are needed by the public.



